

**Artistry and Effectiveness in Language Use:  
The Evaluation of Ways of Speaking Among the Berba of Benin**

Annette R. Czekelius

Submitted for the degree of PhD

School of Oriental and African Studies  
University of London

ProQuest Number: 10672661

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10672661

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

## **Abstract**

This study is about artful speech and the politics of language use among the Berba, a small ethnic group of northern Benin. Despite their integration into a nation state, Berba can still be regarded as an essentially segmentary society. One of the most remarkable features of Berba culture is their highly developed verbal art, not only as regards the wide range of speech genres, but also the sophistication by which local critics assess generic properties and discuss notions of quality and verbal skill. In the investigation I examine three speech genres, namely political language, storytelling and proverb speaking. The thesis addresses two central issues: firstly, similarities and intersections in terms of generic properties and evaluative criteria, and, secondly, inspired by theories of the ethnography of speaking, genre and evaluative criteria in the dynamics of political language use. The discussion in the four central chapters (2-5) makes the following points on the basis of data presented: in the indigenous theory of political language, the key parameters in order to achieve rhetorical success are thoughtfulness, clarity and indirectness. This can directly be linked to the guiding principles of Berba local politics, which is oriented towards consensus building and conflict management, and hence promotes an ideal of persuasive argumentation (thoughtfulness, clarity) and a reconciliatory mode of speech (indirectness). As a comparative investigation reveals, the same properties are valued in the traditions of storytelling and proverb speaking, although for different reasons. While clear diction is indispensable in order to achieve rhetorical success in a storytelling event, it is allusive wording and metaphorical disguise (though with an explicative intent) which is esteemed in proverb speaking. In chapter 6 the example of a political debate brings together the different strands of investigation and illustrates how a number of speech strategies, centred around thoughtfulness, clarity and indirectness, co-occur during the speech event. In terms of the politics of language use observation of cross-generic interrelations substantiates the idea that a speaker, who has acquired verbal competence in one genre or domain of speaking, may usefully draw on the same skills in order to succeed in another.

## Table of contents

<i>List of maps and tables.....</i>	6
<i>Acknowledgements.....</i>	7
<i>Note on orthography.....</i>	9
<b>Chapter I: Introduction.....</b>	12
1. Theoretical background.....	15
2. Methodology.....	23
3. Organisation of chapters.....	27
<b>Chapter II: Historical setting and socio-political organisation.....</b>	29
1. Historical setting.....	29
2. Traditional political organisation.....	36
3. The Berba and the state administration.....	42
4. Village policy.....	46
4.1. Decision-making and consensus orientation.....	46
4.2. Conflict management and the principle of conciliation.....	47
4.2.1. Arbitration.....	47
4.2.2. Litigation.....	48
5. Berba ethics.....	54
5.1. Generosity and modesty.....	61
5.2. Openness and sociability.....	61
5.3. Mediating qualities.....	62
<b>Chapter III: Language use in political settings.....</b>	64
1. Background.....	64
2. Observations during a debate.....	67
2.1. Interactional behaviour.....	67
2.2. Expressive behaviour.....	68
3. Quality assessment of political language.....	70
3.1. The emic conception of a political debate.....	70
3.2. Conventions concerning speech behaviour in a group.....	72
3.3. Quality assessment on the speech act level.....	74
3.3.1. Linguistic competence and textual criteria.....	75
3.3.1.1. Level of content (referential value):.....	75
substantiveness and truth	
3.3.1.2. Structural level: clarity.....	76
3.3.2. The nature of rhetoric in Berba political language.....	77
3.3.3. Social competence.....	82
<b>Chapter IV: <i>swombəfə</i> and the art of storytelling.....</b>	86
1. Storytelling season and storytelling session.....	86
2. Storytelling performance.....	98
3. Quality assessment.....	91
3.1. The nature of laughter in a storytelling performance.....	92



3.1.1. Structural requirements: clarity.....	94
3.1.2. Propositional requirements: insight and substantiveness.....	95
3.2. The nature of thoughtfulness and consternation in.....	96
a storytelling performance	
4. The art of storytelling.....	98
4.1. Linguistic aspects.....	98
4.2. Behavioural aspects.....	99
5. Creativity.....	100
5.1. Recreation.....	101
5.2. Creation.....	103
6. Rhetorical success and rhetorical failure: two examples.....	107
6.1. [ <i>ipama</i> ] – an acclaimed performance.....	108
6.1.1. Authenticity.....	109
6.1.2. Clarity.....	111
6.1.3. Moral and wit.....	114
6.2. [The hyena and the dog] – a performance flaw.....	115
7. Acquisition of storytelling competence.....	119
<b>Chapter V: <i>kwankyamə</i> and the art of proverb speaking.....</b>	<b>121</b>
1. <i>kwankyamə</i> : genre matters.....	122
1.1. Analogy.....	122
1.1.1. Determining the truth value on the literal level – .....	126
the criterion of explicability/ verifiability	
1.1.1.1. Truth of imagery.....	126
1.1.1.2. Truth of the abstract or paradigmatic principle.....	126
1.1.2. Determining the potential for meaningful use – .....	129
the criterion of applicability	
2. Creativity.....	133
3. Quality assessment.....	138
3.1. Use of attention value.....	142
3.2. Use of explanatory value.....	143
3.2.1. Choice of imagery.....	144
3.2.2. Composition of new proverbs.....	144
3.2.3. Positioning of the proverb in the text.....	145
3.2.4. Structuring the main text/ argument.....	146
3.2.5. Length.....	148
3.2.6. Style.....	149
3.3. Use of truth value.....	150
4. Indirectness.....	151
4.1. Introductory proverb.....	152
4.2. Concluding proverb.....	153
5. Rhetorical risk and rhetorical failure.....	160
5.1. Linguistic failure.....	160
5.2. Moral failure.....	161
5.2.1. Deliberate obscurity.....	161
5.2.1.1. Insolence and hypocrisy .....	165
5.2.1.2. Truth and metaphorical action:.....	165
the nature of the proverb master's defeat	

5.2.2. Open aggression.....	167
6. The skills of a proverb speaker.....	168
6.1. Proverb competence.....	168
6.1.1. Good memory.....	169
6.1.2. Intelligence.....	169
6.1.3. Interest.....	171
6.1.4. Acquisition of proverb competence.....	171
6.1.4.1. Play.....	171
6.1.4.2. Discursive speech contexts.....	172
6.1.4.3. Playful proverb use.....	173
6.2. Social competence.....	181
7. Summary of chapters 4 and 5.....	182
<b>Chapter VI: Quality and skill in a political debate – a case study.....</b>	<b>184</b>
1. Introduction.....	184
2. Analysis.....	185
2.1. Sequence 1 (1-4).....	185
2.2. Sequence 2 (5-19).....	186
2.3. Sequence 3 (20-36).....	190
2.4. Sequence 4 (37-68).....	192
2.4.1. Persuasion and clarity.....	197
2.4.1.1. Structure of the text/ argument.....	197
2.4.1.2. <i>kwankyamə</i> : explicative value and truth value.....	199
2.4.2. Conflict management and devices of indirectness.....	204
2.4.2.1. <i>kwankyamə</i> .....	205
2.4.2.2. Use of pronouns.....	206
2.5. Sequence 5 (69-73).....	208
2.6. Sequence 6 (74-84).....	209
2.7. Sequence 7 (85-103).....	211
2.8. Sequence 8 (104-31).....	213
2.9. Sequence 9 (132-57).....	217
2.10. Sequence 10 (156-95).....	222
2.11. Sequence 11 (193-216).....	223
2.12. Sequence 12 (220-57).....	230
2.13. Sequence 13 (258-74).....	232
2.13. 1. Proverb clusters.....	233
2.13. 2. Bad or shocking proverbs.....	235
2.14. Sequence 14 (275-386).....	238
3. Conclusion.....	243
Appendix 1: Tale 1 [ <i>ipama</i> ].....	247
Appendix 2: Tale 2 [The dog and the hyena].....	261
Appendix 3: Tale 3 [The master of all proverbs].....	263
Appendix 4: Children and proverb competence.....	265
Appendix 5: Assembly ‘Water management in Kotari’.....	267
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>281</b>

## **List of maps and tables**

Map1: The Berba settlement area.....	11
Table1: Four versions of the tale [ <i>ipama</i> ].....	110

## Acknowledgements

My work on this project would not have been possible without the support and co-operation of many people. I am grateful to them all but want to mention some in particular.

Several grant agencies and institutions helped financially in the realisation of the project. The Free University of Berlin and the School of Oriental and African Studies offered generous travel grants. Special thanks go to the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes which not only sponsored the largest part of the fieldwork, conducted between 1991 and 1996, but also financed my studies at SOAS.

For intellectual support, critical comments and suggestions I want to thank teachers and friends. I am especially grateful to Prof. Georg Elwert of the Institute of Social Anthropology of the Free University of Berlin without whom I would most probably never have set foot on Benin soil, let alone explore the 'ways of speaking' of a small ethnic group in the country's far north west. His counsel during my first six months of fieldwork, when I was taking part in a research project of the Institute, was invaluable. In particular his advice "Just listen to what people say!" has influenced my work more than he would probably ever have imagined. I also want to thank Dr. R. N'Ouéni, linguist at the Université Nationale du Bénin and fellow at the Free University of Berlin in 1991, who introduced me to the language and culture of his people. It is to Graham Furniss, Dean of Languages at the School of Oriental and African Studies, that I owe a still greater debt of gratitude. Mentor and guide over the past few years, his personal and intellectual support has been indispensable, not only during the supervision of my MA-dissertation in 1993 but also later during my PhD research from 1994 until 1998. While encouraging me to explore new terrain, he was always there to provide generous advice when I was struggling to make sense of the material collected; his constructive commentary has informed the work in more than one regard. Special thanks go to Francesca Partridge and Anne le Morvan who gave me the benefit of careful readings of the final draft, and to Constantin Czekelius, Judith Orland, Tilo Grätz and Philippe Compagnon for their friendship and advice.

It would be impossible to individually thank all those people who supported me during my stay in Berba country, in the sub-prefecture Matéri of Northern Benin. Many of them will introduce themselves in the following pages as theorists and critics of speech behaviour, as orators, storytellers and proverb speakers. There are some, however, who will not occur, but have done as much to advance the project and render the fieldwork such an enjoyable experience. M. Emmanuel Toumoubagou Bega, the mayor of Matéri, and his family were generous hosts during the first two months of my fieldwork. In Kotari, a small village south west of Matéri, where I was living for the rest of the time, it was Mme Kampwoga N'Ouéni, who took me in and gave me a real home in Africa. For her infinite kindness, tolerance and care my heartfelt thanks. One of the greatest assets in the project was M. Dari N'Ouéni, farmer and shop keeper, who was an inspired collaborator and faithful companion from my first days in Kotari. His talent for organisation, his skills as interpreter and language teacher as well as his excellent contacts throughout Berba country helped me enormously. Disposing of a great cultural and linguistic competence, he transcribed almost all the recorded texts and spent long hours with me, not only commenting on linguistic subtleties but also providing important background information to the speech events. Other research assistants include M. Daniel Douté and M. Eric N'Ouéni, two A-level students, who sacrificed their school holidays to help me with the translation of proverbs, tales and litigation sessions. Special thanks also go to M. Emmanuel Idani, ward head in Matéri and a renowned authority on the traditions of proverb speaking, riddling and storytelling. His sophistication as both a performer and critic has done a great deal to improve my understanding of Berba oral culture.

It is to my parents that I owe the most profound debt of gratitude. Sharing my interest in the art and sociology of foreign cultures, they not only provided constant encouragement, but were a continuous source of inspiration. It is hard to imagine how this project would have come into being without them. For their unflagging love and support I say thank you.

## Note on Orthography

Various attempts have been made to establish a standard orthography for the language *byali* (also: *bieri* (Prost 1973) and *biali* (N'Ouéni 1983)). Dialectal differences, irregularities in the pronunciation – the consonants 'l', 'd' and 'r' are not always clearly distinguished – as well as divergent views on the purpose of an alphabetisation, however, have rendered this undertaking rather difficult. The orthography adopted in this study is the modern standard style suggested by two linguists (SIL) in 1995. The guiding idea is to provide an orthography which facilitates an alphabetisation in either the vernacular (for those who are already literate in French) or French (for those who acquire their first writing skills in *byali*). To this end, most phonetic symbols of the former notation system have been replaced with Latin letters. The following symbols are employed (the former version is put in square brackets):

ky [c]	as in German 'Häkchen'
y after hn [ny]	as in German 'ja'
ng [ŋ ]	velar nasal
g [ɣ]	velar affricate
ø	as in French 'le'
e [ɛ]	as in French 'les'
y before vowel [i]	as in English 'read'
w before vowel [u]	as in German 'gut'
hu(n)	nasal

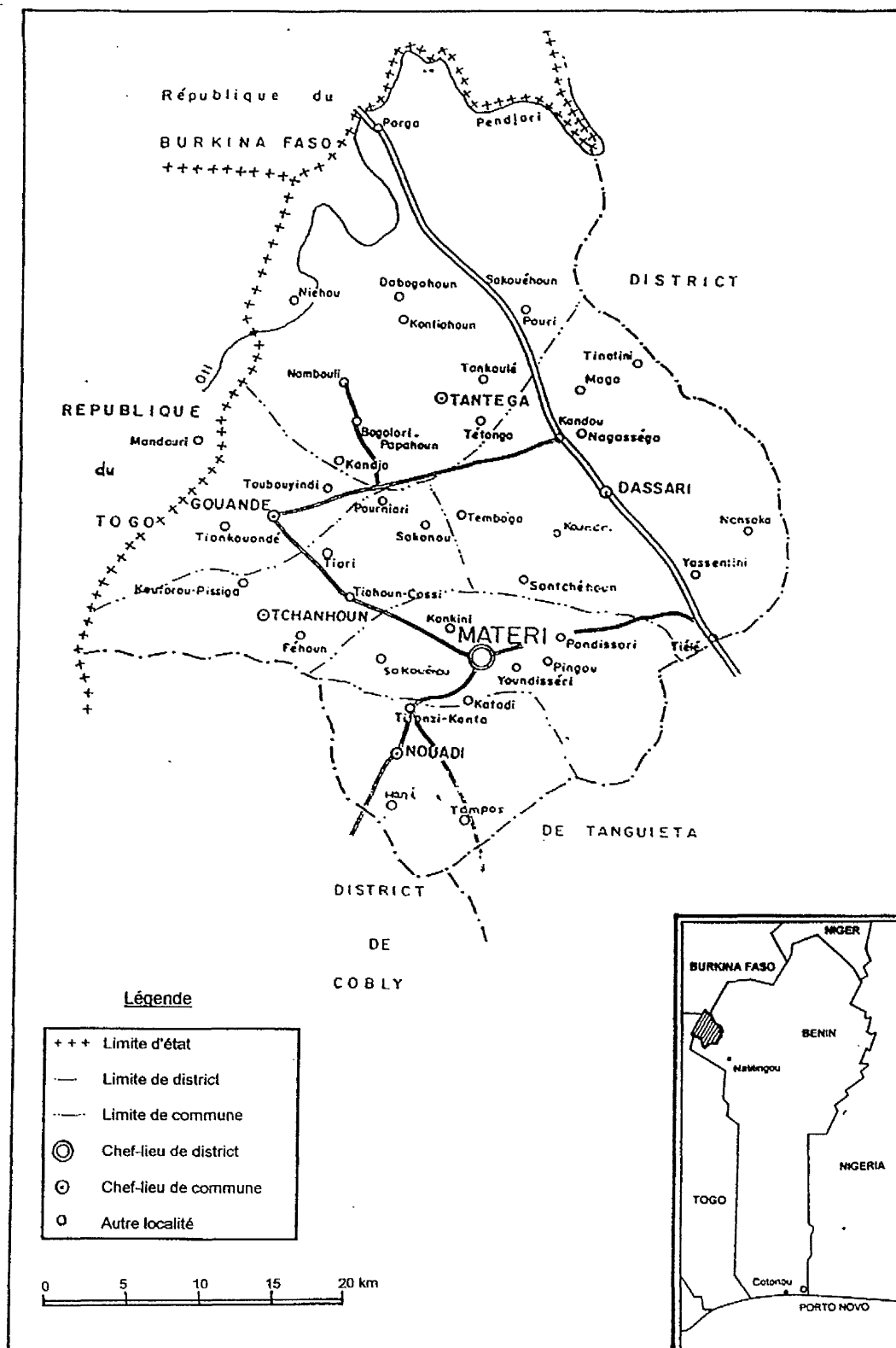
The *byali* language features three pitch levels for vowels: low tone (indicated with a grave accent), mid tone (not marked) and high tone (indicated with an acute accent). Full tone is provided when the accent marks a semantic difference (*bə wàgi* – to destroy, but *bə wági* – to assemble). Although common standard at present, it may well be that this orthography will be further modified in the future. The texts presented in this study are almost exclusively based on the vernacular spoken in the region of Matéri – Kotari.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Also: Kotadi or Kotali.

There are noteworthy differences to the *byali* spoken around Gouandé and Dassari.

Lineation in the transcribed and translated versions is partly subjective, but is based on a combination of the speaker's breath-pauses and the linguistic structure of the text. An exception is direct speech. Although speakers tend to pause between the authorial "X said" and the ensuing utterance I have put it in the same line for reasons of space.



Map 1: The Berba settlement area

Source: Balle (1987/ 88)



## Chapter I: Introduction

The Berba are a small group of about 80, 000 people, dwelling on the foothills of the Atakora mountains in the north-western part of the West African Republic of Benin.<sup>1</sup> Their language is a Gur-language called *byali*. They are subsistence farmers and live from the cultivation of millet, corn, rice and beans and the breeding of some livestock. Even today, twenty years after the implementation of a national education program, an estimated 80% of the adult population is still illiterate. Despite government by a state administration, the basic principles of Berba political organisation have not changed fundamentally. They can still be considered an essentially segmentary society, where there is no institutionalized central power or executive force, and local-level politics centres around consensus-orientation and conflict management.

One of the most remarkable features of Berba society is their highly developed oral culture, not only in terms of the wide range of different genres, but also with regard to the sophistication by which local speakers reflect on and assess their own speech behaviour. Their interest extends to the most varied domains of speaking, including oral literature, political language and day-to-day communication. It is this tradition of verbal artistry, the theory and practice of skilful language use within and across different speech genres, which is the subject of the present investigation. It is an empirical work, which has developed in various stages, based on sixteen months of fieldwork conducted between 1991 and 1996.

The beginnings of this research date back to 1991/ 92, when I spent six months among the Berba as part of a research project organized by the Anthropology Department of the Free University of Berlin. The project was intended to introduce third year students to the methods and practice of anthropological fieldwork. Although the drafting of a research scheme was obligatory, we were nonetheless encouraged to enquire into any subject matter that interested us, even if it deviated entirely from our initial design. In my case, this freedom of approach turned out to be a necessity rather than an option,

---

<sup>1</sup> Alternative spelling: Atacora.

since for various reasons, my initial plans – a study on religious change – proved impracticable. As luck would have it, though, I found myself soon involved with another issue, which would preoccupy me henceforth: Berba oral literature, and, later on, Berba oral culture. Unwittingly, I had arrived in the middle of the ‘period of the new yams’, a festive time of the year when people gather in the evenings to celebrate the harvest of the new yams and entertain each other with riddling and storytelling. With their usual generosity and hospitality, Berba also invited me, the foreign researcher, to participate in these events. I recall the first sessions as a fairly strange experience. There I sat in the midst of a joyful crowd, witnessing and recording an event which was so obviously dominated by the spoken word, of which I understood so little.<sup>2</sup> The only means to get at least some idea of what was going on, was by closely observing the interaction between the speaker and the audience and concluding course and content of the narratives from behavioural patterns. To my own surprise, this exercise turned out to be most revealing. Despite my poor command of the language, I found myself soon engaged in the event, just by listening to the narrative as related by the speaker, his alterations of rhythm, emphasis and speed, and by following the changing mood of the audience, manifest in their facial expressions, in their giggling, laughter or concentrated silence, or, on the contrary, in their decreasing interest and growing boredom. Apart from the content of the stories, whose plot development I only perceived on an abstract level, in terms of tension, release, amusement or thoughtfulness, and a general admiration for the practice of an oral tradition which has long been forgotten in the Western world, this experience also drew my attention to the question of qualitative differences in narratives and narrative skills, for not every performance seemed to enjoy the same success. Having translated more than 200 tales, I began to pursue the issue of verbal artistry in depth. The most natural thing seemed to me to ask the people themselves and base my investigation on their own comments and judgements. As it turned out, this was indeed a most useful approach. Not

---

<sup>2</sup> Despite six months of intensive language preparation prior to the first field trip, my linguistic competence then was by no means sufficient to follow complex speech events right from the beginning. Thanks to patient instruction by N. Kampwoga and other African friends I was able to quickly advance in the vernacular.

only did the Berba prove to be highly interested and co-operative, but they were also amazingly articulate in the way in which they rationalized their own expressive behaviour. The findings of this first in-depth investigation of a speech genre resulted in an MA dissertation in which I explore indigenous concepts of quality and skill in the tradition of storytelling (Czekelius 1993a). Encouraged by the positive results of this first fieldwork experience, I decided to extend my research to another oral literary genre for my PhD which had attracted my interest in the field, but which I had not had the time to investigate in depth. This was the tradition of proverb speaking. One of the particularities of this genre is its essentially discursive character. Hence, one major part of the research consisted of the documentation and analysis of proverb use in context. Now, as anyone knows who has ever worked on this genre, this is a notoriously difficult task, for proverbs simply 'occur' in the course of a conversation or debate, and their recording cannot be planned in advance. To facilitate the task, I began the research by identifying those occasions which were most closely associated with the use of proverbs. As informants pointed out to me, one of the domains closely associated with the use of proverbs was the domain of local-level politics, in particular, litigation, arbitration and public debates. During the following months I endeavoured to attend and record as many of these events as possible. The first session itself, a public assembly, was a memorable experience and would redirect my focus entirely. While witnessing the event, I was struck by the obvious similarities to behaviour and speech patterns I had noted in the storytelling events. At the same time, it became evident that the domain of politics was indeed a fertile ground for the use of proverbs and metaphorical language. Intrigued by these observations, the idea for a research project developed going beyond a synchronic investigation of quality and skill in different speech genres. It would take into account the possibility of interrelations between them on a formal and functional level and explore their implications for individual language use and verbal artistry.

The guiding idea can be put as follows: mastering a speech genre requires certain skills which follow from the generic properties and provide the criteria for assessing the quality of the utterance and the abilities of the speaker. Provided now that different speech genres feature similar properties, it can

reasonably be assumed that these similarities are reflected by and feed back into the skills required to master the genres. For the individual speaker, that would have important consequences. In mastering one genre or acquiring expertise in one domain of speaking, he could build up a pool of linguistic resources which he could then usefully exploit in another genre or domain of speaking. This may be the more significant when interrelations exist between not only different genres, but also different domains of speaking.<sup>3</sup> Verbal skills, acquired in a rather playful way in one domain (e. g. oral literature) could usefully serve in another domain with an immediate impact on the social standing and political influence of the individual (e.g. political language).

To pursue these issues with political language, storytelling and proverb speaking as examples is the intention of the following study. In terms of methodology a two-step approach is required: first of all, we need to establish a comparative basis by exploring speech conventions and evaluative concepts in the three speech genres. Only then will we be able to discern similarities and conjunctures and estimate the implications for the verbal economy of the individual speaker. The analytical perspective is twofold: while the enquiry into different speech styles reflects the indigenous perspective, taking the indigenous meta-discourse as the basis of investigation, the identification and interpretation of the interrelations *between* them is the result of an etic analysis, representing the researcher's point of view.

## 1. Theoretical background

As the terminology already indicates, the study builds largely upon theories developed in the 'ethnography of speaking' (Bauman and Sherzer 1989; Hymes 1974) and elaborated further in the 'ethnography of communication' (Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975; Gumperz and Hymes 1972). It is a movement which has grown out of a reaction against transformational generative linguistics. In turning away from an approach exclusively centred on the grammatical structure of language, demand is made for a socially constituted linguistics, i.e. a

---

<sup>3</sup> "Domains are defined [...] in terms of *institutional contexts and their congruent behavioral co-occurrences*." (Fishman, in Gumperz and Hymes 1972: 441, emphasis by the author).

linguistics whose subject matter is not language but *speaking*, the *use* of language in the conduct of social life, framed in terms of genres, speech styles, speaking roles (Bauman and Sherzer 1989: xii). With this background, scholars have developed a heuristic model whose concepts and assumptions are of great value to our investigation.

There is to begin with the notion of ‘ways of speaking’. One of the main objectives in the ethnography of speaking is to identify and explore the totality of communicative habits of a speech community, the precondition to building a systematic theory. To facilitate such a venture, the concept of ‘ways of speaking’ has been introduced.<sup>4</sup> It is based on the regulative idea that “communicative conduct within a community comprises determinate patterns of speech activity such that the communicative competence of persons comprises knowledge with regard to such patterns.” (Hymes 1974: 45). Ways of speaking, then, are defined by nothing but the fact that they are ‘determinate’, and as such identifiable and distinguishable from each another. With reference to the linguist Ervin-Tripp, Hymes introduces the rules of co-occurrences and alternation, the point being “that one can characterize whatever features go together to identify a style of speech in terms of rules of co-occurrence among them, and can characterize choice among styles in terms of rules of alternation.” (1989: 434). These co-occurrent features – we may also call them ‘speech conventions’ – comprise the most different elements, including structural (i.e. stylistic, referential or behavioural) aspects, which are constitutive of the speech mode itself, and rules determining its context of use. The value of such a (deliberately) general concept is evident. In taking nothing but distinguishability as its defining criterion, a basis is created which allows the most different patterns of speech activity to be compared, regardless of their structural aspects, the kind and degree of their formal organisation or their ascription to a generic category. Whether marked or unmarked, poetic or discursive speech, whether storytelling, proverb speaking or political language they all qualify as ‘ways of speaking’ and can therefore be identified and approached with the same analytical tools.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The terms ‘speech genre’ and ‘way of speaking’ are used interchangeably.

<sup>5</sup> While “ways of speaking” is a valuable heuristic device, it is useful to further specify the respective modes of speaking according to their inherent qualities. Thus, I will

Closely linked with the notion of determinate patterns of speech activity is another concept which is also of crucial importance to our study (and has already been indicated in the statement above): that of skill or communicative competence. A set of speech conventions not only constitutes a frame of reference which allows a certain speech style to be identified. From the point of view of the individual speaker, it also provides an orientation as to what criteria have to be met if the intention is to succeed in a verbal performance. In developing further N. Chomsky's notion of 'linguistic competence', which denotes the ability to understand and produce grammatically correct sentences, this knowledge has been termed 'communicative competence'. Following the distinction made above, it can be expected to comprise at least two aspects: first, knowledge with regard to structural properties, defining the mode of speaking itself (tunes, gestures, standard expressions, stylistic conventions) and secondly, knowledge as regards the "system of its use, regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, etc." (Hymes 1974: 75). The latter has also been labelled the '*sociolinguistic*' competence of a speaker. The communicative competence of a joke teller, then, is not only measured in terms of whether he is able to produce a concise, witty and well-structured text, but also whether he has observed the norms prescribing its context of use, i.e. whether he tells the joke in the course of a light-hearted conversation or during a funeral (Ben-Amos 1971).

The notion of 'communicative competence' leads to a third concept, that of performance. Predicated upon the analytical distinction between a way of speaking as a structural system and its realisation by an individual speaker in verbal interaction, is the idea of a critical assessment of the speech act and

---

speak of 'genre' for the tradition of storytelling and proverb speaking, the discriminating factors being their ascription to a local category and the identification of traditionally recognized formal characteristics. Political language in turn, I wish to consider as a major situational speech style or simply a 'mode of speaking'. Although (equally) identified by a set of co-occurrent features, it nonetheless differs in so far as it, first, does not bear a generic label and secondly, is defined less by formal markers than by the speech situation and its associated behavioural maxims (gossip, for example, is not defined by formulaic expressions or a generic label, but by the nature and function of the speech event – the informal and confidential spreading of rumours – which in turn determines the verbal habitus of the speaker (use of everyday language, deployment of linguistic markers suggesting intimacy, secrecy, speaking in a low voice etc.)).

communicative competence of the speaker with regard to this system. Bauman, in referring to Hymes, defines performance as a “mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content. From the point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus laid open to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer’s display.” (1986: 3). In this definition, then, theory and practice of language use are brought together in a unifying concept, that of performance. Corresponding to the complex nature of communicative competence, we can expect that the canon of evaluative criteria, according to which the relative skill of the speaker is measured, extends not only to structural, referential or behavioural, but also to social and moral aspects.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, there is the emphasis on verbal interaction, the *use* of language in a given speech context. The speaker is perceived as engaged in a communicative event, thereby exploiting and manipulating language for the purpose of achieving certain ends, whether his intention is to convince, inform, entertain or simply to be sociable. In this process, he will choose from a pool of linguistic resources (styles, genres, registers, varieties), which appear to him to be suitable in the given circumstances. The choice is determined by various factors, including his personal objective as well as the (assumed) expectations of his model of language use, two aspects need to be emphasized. There is, first, the notion of agency, expressed by the term ‘speech *event*’, relating to “activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech” and the term ‘speech *act*’ as its minimal analytical unit (Hymes 1974: 52). Secondly, there is the idea of creativity and intentionality in language use,

---

<sup>6</sup> The notion of performance serves as a useful analytical concept, foregrounding aspects of skill and quality in rule-governed speech behaviour. Yet, like ‘ways of speaking’, it will be specified further in the individual chapters, for it is still closely associated with histrionic elements and an explicitly artistic mood, both of which do not necessarily correspond to the indigenous ideal of an apposite mode of speaking. I thus prefer to speak of the telling or narration of a tale, the delivery of a discourse and the application of a proverb.

whether the intent is conscious or subconscious.<sup>7</sup> It will play a particularly important role in the later part of the investigation, where the speech behaviour of participants in a political debate is scrutinized. The inherent dynamics which characterize any discursive speech event and which require verbal strategies constantly adjusted to the changing conditions of the speech situation offer an ideal opportunity to study a speech economy 'in action'.

Apart from these general assumptions, the study draws on and contributes to three other disciplines which have also been influenced by the ethnography of speaking, yet aim in rather different directions.

First, there is a range of cross-generic studies which attempt to present a coherent view of *an* oral literature or culture by seeking out inner relationships between local categories. The findings differ according to the regional focus and data available. Speech genres are seen as interrelated by either occasional conjunctures and interpenetrations (Sherzer 1990) or a single underlying principle – a society's world view (Gossen 1971) or a basic textual pattern (Haring 1992). Despite these differences, the methodological approach remains the same: in accordance with the analytical framework established by the ethnography of speaking, speech styles are analyzed for their constituent elements – formal, structural or functional – which are then related and compared to each other. A detailed taxonomic analysis and the occasional reference to an existing meta-discourse, suggesting intracultural validity, complement the investigations (Briggs 1988; Eastman 1984; Sherzer 1983).

Although equally concerned with investigation across genre boundaries, the present study nonetheless is limited in at least two ways: first of all, it is not holistic in design, i.e. does not endeavour to cover the entirety of a community's speech behaviour. Instead it contents itself with three modes of speaking: storytelling, proverb speaking and political language. A second, and major difference, however, regards the theoretical basis. As previously explained, the subject of our investigation is not genres or speech styles *per se*, but the

---

<sup>7</sup> Linguistic interaction, as Bernstein (1964) has pointed out, can be most fruitfully viewed as a process of decision-making, in which speakers select from a range of possible expressions.



individual who 'does' i.e. relates, reports, applies them in the course of a communicative event. Accordingly, interrelations between different patterns of speech activity are not simply 'noted', but interpreted in the light of individual language use. From this view, the question of interrelations is no longer a matter of structure, but one of skill (the speaker as he exploits generic properties within and across genre boundaries).

The second discipline to which this study contributes, is that of folklore studies or oral literature. Until the early 1970s, the dominant approach in this domain was predicated upon a rather static notion of folklore as text. The subject of study was the 'lore' of a people, perceived as a particular cultural heritage, preserved and transmitted in an unchanged fashion down through generations. Respectively, the main concerns were the documentation of verbal material and text analyses. As a result of developments in the ethnography of speaking, however, a radical shift in perspective occurred, commonly described as a move from product to process, from folklore to the *speaking* of folklore. The focus is no longer on the genre per se, manifest in frozen texts, but on the speaker who enacts, relates, delivers it in performance, lending it its unique shape by means of his own creative power. This shift in focus is clearly expressed in the following remark by Bauman, who notes on the role of the speaker that "the structured system stands available to them as a set of conventional expectations and associations, but these expectations and associations are further manipulated in innovative ways." (1975: 301). In this view, the speaker advances from being a mere guardian of an ancient heritage to a verbal artist, creatively handling (given) verbal material – a move which is also reflected in the tendency to speak of 'oral literature' instead of folklore. The questions which ensue from this shift in perspective centre around aspects of composition, authorship and speaker-audience relationships (Lord 1960; Okpweho 1990a, b, c; Priebe 1979; Sekoni 1990). 'Context', 'framing' and the 'emerging quality of performance' become key terms in investigation (Dundes 1964; Finnegan 1977; Goffman 1974). Although there can be no doubt about the significance of this development for folklore studies, liberating the discipline from its text-centredness and drawing attention instead to the act of performance and the role of the speaker, one aspect has been somewhat

neglected, which is closely related to these issues, yet presents them in a somewhat different light. I am referring here to the notion of 'quality'. While it is certainly true that any performance, by virtue of its ephemeral character and the creative agency of the speaker, by definition displays an 'emerging quality', it does not necessarily mean that, from an indigenous point of view, it also constitutes 'quality' in a strictly evaluative sense. In other words, the 'innovative manipulation' of language does not necessarily mean 'artistry'. A performer may succeed, as much as he may fail (at least in the eyes of a critical audience). The measure of failure and success will be the evaluative framework, which derives from the 'structured system of conventional expectations' mentioned above. Our focus then is on the dynamic relationship between this structure and its realisation in performance, between the theory and practice of language use. So far, few attempts have been made to examine this sphere in depth by exploring local systems of evaluation and assessing actual performances against the background of these systems, including the documentation of successful and failed performances (Azuonye 1990; Chimombo 1988).<sup>8</sup> The intention of the present study is to contribute to this still little researched field. Another aspect to which the shift from folklore to the speaking of folklore has drawn attention, is the relationship between the text and the context (dealt with in the anthropology of poetics). An oral text is no longer conceived as a piece of ancestral heritage recited in a social vacuum, an etiolation of language which is functionally hollow or void. Instead it is seen as embedded in a social context in which "the relationships between the attributes of verbal messages and the social-cultural reality are in constant interplay." (Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975: 3). An adequate approach towards an oral text

---

<sup>8</sup> This omission is astonishing in so far as it was an early claim of the ethnography of speaking to explore normative notions of ability which provide the indispensable background to the study of actual abilities. One reason may be that many investigations already start from the assumption of artistry, the "discovery" of the speaker's (innovative) skills, complying with the Western concept of art, which is based on the notion of a creative genius. From this point of view, enquiries into systems of norms and rules and the possibility of a speaker *failing* to comply with them do not suggest themselves. Another explanation concerns the role of the audience, who are first and foremost considered as active partners in the interaction, while their function as critical observers is rather neglected. Finally, there are methodological problems. As we will discuss in a later paragraph, research conditions are particularly difficult for exploring evaluative systems and criteria of quality assessment.

therefore includes the context in which it occurs. A whole range of interesting research has been conducted in this area, exploring the function of folklore as a communicative strategy in settings featuring unequal power relations (Abu-Lughod 1986; Fretz 1994; Furniss and Gunner 1995; Gunner 1979; Jama 1994; Timpunza 1987) or the construction of social reality through performance (Bauman and Briggs 1990). One domain which has greatly been influenced by this shift in perspective is that of proverb studies. Perceived for a long time as isolated texts detached from their context of use proverbs are now analyzed in their function as communicative strategies in verbal interaction. The focus shifts from the literal to the applied level; it is no longer the text as manifestation of ancestral wisdom, but its meaning in a given speech context which is emphasized. Despite impressive achievements, particularly concerning the construction of theories of proverb use, ethnographic data is still insufficient – a fact which can partly be ascribed to the difficult research conditions surrounding the recording of proverb use in context. The numerous examples of proverb use provided in this study may help to fill this gap.

Finally, there is the ‘anthropology of political language’. It is a relatively young discipline which developed in the mid 1970s, inspired by innovative research in linguistics and political anthropology. Its subject matter is speech behaviour in political settings, including *palabras*, negotiations, litigation, arbitration and political assemblies.<sup>9</sup> Parkin (1984), in his review essay, distinguishes two main approaches: the first is usually associated with a group of (American) researchers, who, in the attempt to cover the whole of a community’s linguistic resources, extend their interest to political language (or at least to domains dubbed ‘political’). Investigations revolve around the

---

<sup>9</sup> The complex notion of politics comprises two dimensions: in its widest sense, it denotes any attempt to influence human relationships (which brings it close to the domain of social behaviour). In its narrow sense, it refers to those activities which directly pertain to the political order (Endruweit and Tromsdorff 1989: 490). It is the latter definition which our investigation will dwell upon. Nonetheless, it ought to be emphasized that a clear demarcation is not always possible, particularly in uncentralized, small-scale societies such as the Berba, where there is no professionalisation of local-level politics and relations in political settings are, to a large extent, also social relations (participants in a public debate are not only interacting as political subjects, but they are also tied by close personal bonds through friendship, neighbourhood links, parental relations etc., imposing constraints on them which are not necessarily political (in the narrow sense of the word).

identification and analysis of speech genres as well as rules governing speech events. Similarly, scholars of oral literature display some interest in the properties and functions of political language, whereby their analyses are confined to highly stylized modes of speech behaviour, such as myths, praise songs, oratory etc. The second approach is closely connected with a group of scholars who received their training in political anthropology and are particularly concerned with the issue of the creation and distribution of power. The focus here is the relationship between language use and political order. The debates centre around issues such as the role of political language in the perpetuation and negotiation of political order or, in a wider sense, the construction of social and political reality through performance (Bloch 1975; Paine 1981a). Unlike the performative approach, the emphasis here is less on speech conventions, and more on text-context relations, on referential aspects, and on form-function relationships. With its particular theoretical interest, our study draws on and reconciles both trends. By asking about quality and skill in the use of political language, it requires, on the one hand, an in-depth investigation of the properties that define the speech genre itself, and on the other hand, the careful contextualisation of the speech act within the socio-political order, for it is this order which provides the backdrop for evaluative concepts.<sup>10</sup> The examination and critical evaluation of a political debate will illustrate this point.

## **2. Methodology**

One of the particularities of this study is its essentially emic (as opposed to an etic) perspective, at least as far as the analysis of the three modes of speaking is concerned.<sup>11</sup> The point of departure for an enquiry into notions of skill and quality is the indigenous meta-discourse, i.e. the way in which native speakers perceive and assess their own expressive behaviour. There are two motivations for this approach: the first one is a general consideration of the adequacy of ethnographic records of cultural behaviour. There has been a repeated demand

---

<sup>10</sup> A similar approach is taken by Albert in her rich and sensitive account of the function and efficiency of different patterns of speech activity in Burundi (1964).

<sup>11</sup> For coinage of the terms see Pike (1966).

to develop and apply methods which allow for the highest degree of intracultural validity in ethnographic accounts. One of the most useful models in this regard has been developed in the notion of ethnoscience. It suggests an investigation which starts from the collection of "productive statements about the relevant relationships obtaining among locally defined categories and contexts (of objects and events) within a given social matrix." (Conklin 1964: 25-26, also cited in Hymes 1974: 12). This leads, in turn, to the critical examination of intracultural relations and ethnotheoretical models, which may then provide a basis for controlled comparison or any other generalizing or analytical approach. The second consideration is more closely related to the nature of our problem and concerns what constitutes an apposite approach towards notions of quality and skill. So far, evaluative concepts have been explored from a mainly etic perspective. Speech styles are examined for their co-occurent features and an ideal system is established on the basis of these patterns. Unlike this structure-oriented approach, the method applied in this investigation is based on the concept of performance. A performance, it has been noted earlier on, entails the idea of a speaker putting his relative skills on display while agreeing to be evaluated by an audience. Following this definition, the easiest (and most obvious) way to explore local concepts of quality is to start with the people who are directly involved in this process: the recipient and the performer. The recipient represents the most valuable source, for it is he who, consciously or subconsciously, applies the canon of evaluative criteria, but the speaker is also important, for he can be expected to have a certain idea of his audience's expectations and the criteria he has to meet if he intends to achieve rhetorical success.<sup>12</sup> Such an approach seems to be the more

---

<sup>12</sup> Although speaker and recipient constitute analytically different categories, a clear demarcation is not always possible. The result can be described as a 'double-bind effect' with regard to both the awareness of and compliance with the canon of evaluative criteria. A storyteller may join the audience after his performance and judge the skill of his successor from the point of view of a critical observer, while a critic may change his role and decide to narrate a tale himself. Due to this convergence of roles, both are likely to display a heightened awareness of the audience's expectations and the speech conventions which determine the quality of a performance. This awareness is reinforced by another mechanism, which is particularly effective in face-to-face interactions. In speech situations, where the artist is directly confronted with his audience and depends on their approval for continuation, the degree to which he can ignore speech conventions is considerably lower than in a society where the artist is not

appropriate (if not required) if the researcher, as in my case, is not a member of the speech community and thus unlikely to be able to assess verbal conduct with the same sensitivity and expertise as a native speaker. Now, the demand for a greater involvement of local speakers in the analytical process is not new. Bauman and Briggs, for example, note that "to make more reliable use of native speakers' meta-level discourse on language we must regard performers and audience members not simply as sources of data but as intellectual partners who can make substantial theoretical contributions to this discourse." (1990: 61).<sup>13</sup> Yet, despite these claims, there are remarkably few monographs which translate this programme into action. One reason is because interest in such questions is still limited, and another because research is especially problematic in this field. More than once researchers have reported of considerable difficulties in trying to obtain evaluative or at least analytical comments from their informants. People prove either reluctant or unable to theorise on their speech behaviour and rationalize their aesthetic response. In view of these obstacles, I feel especially privileged to have been able to work with a people as co-operative and articulate as the Berba. Their sophistication justifies speaking of 'critics' and not of informants (it goes without saying that not *all* Berba are equally articulate).<sup>14</sup> Thanks to these fortunate conditions it has been possible to take a

---

immediately exposed to a critical audience (like the author of a book) and where the existence of an artwork is not forcibly dependent upon the critics' acclaim (a painting may persist, even if dismissed by the public, while the existence of an oral tale essentially depends on the approval by an audience who has to remember and retell it to keep it 'alive'.)

<sup>13</sup> A similar trend can be noted in the anthropology of the visual arts. In pointing to conceptual biases in the study of non-Western art, researchers propagate an approach which takes indigenous aesthetics, i.e. the local evaluative criticism, as the basis of investigation: "The aesthetic values of any primitive work of art are only to be understood in the light of a knowledge of what is thought to be right or wrong or socially desirable by the artist concerned and the patrons who employ him." (Leach 1961: 38). As in oral literary criticism, however, research conditions are particularly difficult and comparative data are scarce (cf. Cole 1982: 157-82).

<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to tell whether this sophistication derives from a long-standing tradition of critical evaluation or is just an expression of intellectual curiosity and a certain penchant for sharp-witted discussion, so typical for many Berba. In view of the fact that it is considered extremely impolite to openly criticize a speaker during (and immediately after) a performance, I tend to support the latter explanation. Nonetheless, there are various instances of an established meta-discourse. They may take the form of a private dress rehearsal, as in the storytelling tradition, where the composer of a tale asks his family members for critical comments on his creation, or occur as informal teaching, such as in the tradition of proverb speaking, when inexperienced speakers ask

multi-layered approach and combine the most varied techniques. Basically, the study draws on three sources: There is, first, the evaluative meta-discourse in which critics discuss and explicate concepts and theories of speech behaviour. Secondly, the findings are compared with and illuminated by examples of recorded speech events. While the indigenous theory helps to discern speech patterns and comprehend their role in a given speech event, the recorded data serve to validate, modify or complement the indigenous statements, which, after all, convey an *ideal* of verbal behaviour. The third source consists of group discussions where verbal material – either original recordings or invented texts – is presented to and assessed by native speakers. Apart from illustrating the practice of genre and quality assessment, the elicitation of indigenous criticism offers an excellent opportunity to check the conclusions drawn from recordings and interviews.<sup>15</sup>

To take an essentially emic perspective does not mean denying either the worth or necessity of an etic account. Anthropology is always about building bridges between different cultures, between different ways of thinking and systems of representation. As such, it will always rely on an input of conceptual frameworks distinct from the one under scrutiny. This ‘etic grid’, as Hymes calls it, may help to perceive the functions and properties that may be present and facilitate comparison. The purpose, however, is not to prove the ‘fit’ of ethnographic data with a western model, but to render local conceptions more accessible by translating them into a familiar code. In our study this ‘grid’ is provided by oral literature, rhetoric and political anthropology.

---

well-versed proverb users for explanations and further instruction. The evaluative statements cited in our investigation are all drawn from interviews and group discussions which were held at my request.

<sup>15</sup> One of the requirements (and difficulties) in enquiring into evaluative concepts and indigenous criticism is creating research conditions which allow the most useful statements to be obtained. As it appears, it is particularly important to take into account personal relationships and differences in power relations that exist between speaker and critics, for they may have a negative impact on the willingness to judge and assess a performance (a young Berba will hesitate to frankly criticize the performance of an elder, a villager to criticize his neighbour’s and a wife her husband’s performance). To avoid such distortions, a useful means is to choose the group of critics from a locality different from that where the recording has been made. Another technique is to play several recordings of the same genre but of a different quality and ask the critics to rank them on an exclusively positive scale (extremely good - very good - good).

### **3. Organisation of chapters**

To comprehend evaluative concepts in language use, a thorough knowledge of the social, cultural and political framework in which speaking occurs is indispensable. Chapter 2 gives a brief outline of Berba history, before it introduces their social and political order as it is today. It describes the tense relationship between the state administration and the local population and establishes the persistence of principles of the traditional segmentary order despite government by a 'foreign' power. A concluding paragraph deals with the indigenous ethics, the canon of norms and values which follow from social constraints and underpin interactional, including verbal, behaviour. Chapter 3 turns to the first mode of speaking and explores local conceptions of quality and skilful language use in political debates. In drawing on the local meta-discourse, I discuss the impact of contextual exigencies on speech conventions, point to the close link between social and political interaction and infer the ethnotheoretical model of political rhetoric. In chapters 4 and 5 I leave the domain of politics and examine the same issue – evaluative concepts and their implications for verbal skills – in the two oral literary traditions of storytelling and proverb speaking. The analyses provide detailed descriptions of the various contexts of use, discuss notions of creativity and the acquisition of performative competence, and supply examples of successful and failed performances. Chapter 6 returns to the domain of politics with the discussion and evaluation of language use in a public assembly. It is a long chapter which serves two ends: first it validates the findings of chapters 2 and 3 by illustrating 'politics in action' and providing examples of failure and success in language use. Secondly, it corroborates the thesis of an interrelatedness between different ways of speaking by demonstrating how evaluative concepts and patterns of speech activity, noted in the tradition of storytelling and proverb speaking, recur in the context of a political debate. In a concluding paragraph, the observation of recurrent patterns within and across different modes of speaking is interpreted in the light of an individual speech economy.

Throughout the study, I will use the initials and not the full names of speakers, critics and interviewees. This is to protect the specific identities of the



people involved in the sometimes rather delicate process of quality assessment. The local meta-discourse is presented in a French translation, while ethnographic examples serving to illustrate ethnotheoretical concepts are provided in an English translation (*byali* -transcriptions are supplied in the appendices). This reflects the development of my linguistic skills throughout the project. When I began the study with an inquiry into theories of language use, my speaking (but not comprehending) abilities were still limited. I thus preferred to conduct the interviews with the aid of M. N'Ouéni, my interpreter and research assistant. Each interview has been transcribed and the French translation cross-checked with the *byali* original. With the advancement of the project my linguistic skills also improved, so that I was finally able to work in the vernacular myself, still, however, closely supervised by M. N'Ouéni. It was this phase in which the in-depth investigations of actual speech events were carried out.

## Chapter II: Historical setting and socio-political organisation

### 1. Historical setting

Within the borders of the Benin nation state, the peoples settling in the far north-west enjoy the lowest esteem.<sup>1</sup> They are looked down on by their fellow southern citizens who consider them as 'backward' and 'uncivilized' (if not 'savage') and ascribe their 'poor' cultural evolution, manifest in the lack of a hierarchical order, to their long lasting isolation in the Atakora-mountains. That this is a distorted view reflecting more on the cultural bias of the governing south than about actual developments in the north, is suggested by historical and ethnographic evidence, drawn from oral tradition, chronicles and colonial documents.

The West African Sahel has had a sometimes belligerent history. It has witnessed battles and violent encounters which accompanied the rise and fall of the great Sudan empires, such as Gana, Mali, Songhai (8th-15th c.), Mosi-Dagomba and Gurmantche (16th c.) or the Fulbe states in the 17th and 18th c. Whoever succeeded in these struggles for power and hegemony, the victims were usually the autochthonous population, who could only choose between subordination or withdrawal into less accessible areas. One of these refuge areas

---

<sup>1</sup> So far, the Berba have received little attention in ethnographic literature. Apart from a few detailed studies regarding their language *byali* aspects of history and ethnography (Balle 1987/ 88; Tiando 1978, 1987) as well as two recent evaluations of agricultural practices in the region around Matéri (Marin 1990; Tassou 1989), no in-depth investigation has ever been undertaken. This ignorance both results from and accounts for the fact that the Berba are most often treated as 'part of the Atakora population', but are not considered in their own right. The lack of curiosity in the cultural variety of the different peoples inhabiting the Atakora may partly derive from a confusion concerning the label 'Somba'. Originally serving as a foreign label for the Betammaribe (also: Bè Tammaribè), a small ethnic group dwelling in the south-westerly parts of the region, famous for their *Tatas*, elaborate mud-constructions and extensively described by Mercier (1968), the term soon became synonymous with the whole of the Atakora population. In view of the scarcity of data, any attempt at a Berba chronicle must remain preliminary and tentative. Apart from the few studies mentioned above, the principal sources are personal recordings of oral traditions, historical and archaeological studies on the Sahel-Sudan (Cornevin 1981; Dittmer 1979; Norris 1986; N'Tia 1993), colonial documents and unpublished data material of one colleague in the field (Grätz 1992, 1998).

was the chain of the Atakora mountains, a low mountain range which runs in a north-westerly direction from the Niger to the Oti river and links what is now Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin. As a result of the continuing unrest in the Sahel Sudan, the area experienced several migratory waves, flowing in from mainly northern and western areas, whereby the most recent arrivals gradually forced their predecessors further into the mountains. According to historical accounts, the first large influx of refugees dates back to the 14th c. when the rising military powers, Mosi and Gourma entered into a war with the Mali and Songhai empires (N'Tia 1993: 111-12).

The Berba, or those who would later come to be known by this name, were the last to arrive in the area.<sup>2</sup> Evading the increasing pressure of the

---

<sup>2</sup> The scarcity of sources render it impossible to make any firm statements about Berba identity at the time of immigration. A look at etymological explanations of their ethnic label does not help to elucidate the matter any further. Comevin advocates a heteronomous etymology, assuming that the name were labels given by their adversaries ("pour les Bariba, *Berba* signifiant "homme de la brousse" pour opposition à homme évolué, organisé. Pour les Tyokossi qui ne pouvaient pas garder les Berba prisonniers du fait qu'ils s'évadaient comme le sable fin (bialou) s'échappe de la main." (Comevin 1981: 36). N'Ouéni, in turn, advances a homonymous explanation arguing that the name 'Berba' was in fact the misread version of the term '*biarebe*', denoting the people and language at the same time. Yet, in neither case is there any hint as to whether the formation of an ethnic group had taken place prior or posterior to their migration into the Atakora. Whatever the answer, nowadays there is little doubt about their ethnic identity. When talking to French speaking people, native people would refer to themselves as 'Berba', their official name, which I will use throughout. In the vernacular spoken in the region around Matéri and Kotari, the term would be *byala n dya*, those from *byalahun*, Berba country. (Grätz has found the term *bierebe* by which the inhabitants in and around Gouandé refer to themselves (personal communication)). Their identity is based on a shared language, a compulsory communal initiation leading to full membership of Berba society, and communal rites of animal sacrifice. (Interestingly, the passing of the same initiation ceremony not only shapes ethnic identity, but at the same time fosters a sense of belonging to three neighbouring groups, the Niende, Natemba and Gurmantche, who practise the same initiation rites and together constitute a close inter-ethnic network, tightened by communally shared values and a set of mutual obligations. It is not clear whether the network had existed before or is a phenomenon that came into existence after the settlement in the Atakora, created as defence strategy against superior powers who threatened the local population by raids and repeated intrusions. The latter interpretation is corroborated by the following remark, in which a Berba elder recalls the principal duties of the *kuntasi*, the 'brothers of initiation', one of which was mutual help and defence in times of war: "C'est la solidarité. Si quelqu'un venait de l'extérieur et il agressait peut-être un Gourmantche, tous les Berba étaient dedans...au moment de la guerre de Kobli, tous les Berba avaient participé pour la défense. Parce qu'on avait passé le même couvent." (TY in Int. 04/06/95).

Gurmantche, who themselves had to retreat to the south in face of the expanding Fulbe states, they settled at the western fringes of the Atakora mountains at the end of the 17th century. Other refugees joined them in the 18th and 19th centuries, escaping from the hegemonic endeavours of the burgeoning polity of the Anufo or Tyokossi.<sup>3</sup> The autochthonous population was either absorbed or driven away. Favourable natural conditions – a fertile soil, sufficient rain and dense forests with abundant game – allowed for successful farming and the accretion of moderate wealth. Soon, trade links were established throughout the Atakora, and friendly relations with other peoples were fostered by marital bonds. Yet this peaceful time was not to last. Soon, the prosperous life in the mountains attracted the interest of powerful neighbours such as the Gurmantche warriors in the north and the Wasangari, mounted Bariba nobles, in the south, who saw a favourable opportunity to augment their own possessions by appropriating foreign wealth. It was the prelude to a long series of raids and razzias. To the Berba, settling furthest to the west, the main threat came from the Tyokossi, former mercenaries of the Sudanese armies, who had conquered the north-east of what is now Togo and set up their own chiefdom on the banks of the Oti river. Their capital, Sasane Mango (in fact a war camp rather than a capital), was situated about 100 km from Berbaland (cf. Köhler 1985: 232-33). Since the Tyokossi were passionate soldiers, who exhibited a profound dislike of any kind of farming activity, raids into adjacent areas were of vital importance. The loot either served to satisfy their own demands or was bartered against other needed items such as salt or iron, which reached the area via the Sokoto – Sansane Mango trade link. In addition, slave hunting expeditions were organized on a regular basis, which supplied the (predominantly male) population of Sasane Mango with women and a labour force and compensated the Ashante for their military support during the conquest of north-eastern Togo. Although the arrival of the new French and German colonial rulers finally stopped these raids, the region still experienced unrest. Foreign aggression had not hindered the development of internal power struggles and until the 60s bitter feuds were waged between various clans and ethnic groups (Dittmer, 1979:

---

<sup>3</sup> There is no standard spelling. We equally find Cakosi, Cyokossi, Tchokossi, Tyokosi, Tiokossi.

507). Elderly informants still recall the old days, when it was risky and hazardous to travel from one village to the next. It was only after independence in 1960, due to a short-lived interest in the north, that the implementation of the state law (in particular criminal law) was more rigidly enforced, and peace was finally restored.

Troublesome and difficult as times have been, there is one characteristic trait which runs through Berba history and accounts not only for much of their past, but also for their present day local politics. It is their strong commitment to independence and self-determination, an attitude which readily shows in the following account, in which an elder relates the migration history of the Mateba clan of Kotari:

“C’est les Tyokossi qui nous avaient chassé parce qu’eux, ils possédaient les armes à feu. Ils avaient exigé à notre ancêtre une soumission totale à leur souverain. Mais notre ancêtre refusa, car, pour lui c’était une indignation totale. Pour les punir, le roi des Tyokossi leur déclara la guerre. N’ayant pas la même force de frappe, nos ancêtres ont préféré fuir [...] Jusqu’à aujourd’hui, un Mateba ne peut jamais se décoiffer devant un roi.” (TY in Int. 22/11/91).<sup>4</sup>

According to TY, it simply was inconceivable (“indignation totale”) to their forebears to surrender to and bow before a foreign ruler. Yet in view of his superior force there was little alternative but to choose the exit option and retreat into less accessible areas. The tactics of withdrawal remained one of the principal means of evading exploitation and foreign domination, whether this meant migration, as in the early days, or simply disappearance in the bush. Elderly informants still know hidden caves, far up in the mountains, which formerly served as refuge to those fleeing from raiders or slave-hunters.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The French used in the quotes is obviously not literary French, as recommended by the Académie Française, but French as spoken in rural West Africa by non-native speakers (including the researcher). Moreover, in translating the vernacular into French, it has been my intention to make a translation which retains the feel of the African idioms. Syntax and style may thus sound even more colloquial, if not ‘strange’ to the native speaker’s ear.

<sup>5</sup> Archaeological evidence (the remains of lofts and food-stores) suggests that people were well prepared and could survive for some time (Norris 1986: 134).

Another more indirect strategy was to settle at some distance from each other, and so impede efficient exploitation and control.<sup>6</sup> Even today the Berba exhibit a clear preference for dispersed settlement. Sometimes however, there was neither time nor opportunity to escape, and people had to actively defend themselves. Also in this regard the Berba proved determined. Their dwellings resembled small fortresses, with a system of round and rectangular huts, linked by a high mud wall and arranged around an inner courtyard, leaving nothing but a small upper window in the ancestors' hut through which to enter the compound.<sup>7</sup> An efficient communication network, operating between the hamlets and villages, allowed for the quick formation of small, yet powerful fighting corps, recruited from young male initiates.<sup>8</sup> Their intrepid nature and strike power even impressed such experienced warriors as the Wasangari, mounted nobles of the Bariba chiefdom, who were among their chief enemies. A Wasangari recalls: "Quand les Bangana organisaient des expéditions contre les Somba et les Berba, ils ne pensaient pas que leurs futurs adversaires étaient des femelettes. Ils savaient bien qu'ils se défendraient avec acharnement. Ils n'ignoraient pas que des Wasangari trouveraient la mort." (Karl 1974: 145-46).

Given the Berbas commitment to freedom and independence, it is not surprising that the French colonial government, which ruled over (then) Dahomey from 1894, had considerable difficulties in integrating the Berba (as well as the rest of the Atakora population) into their system. To the Berba, the French were just another foreign power which intended to exploit and dominate them, and thus people drew on approved strategies in order to evade or withstand the new regime. In the early days of colonial government, this was

---

<sup>6</sup> That this was indeed a deliberate strategy, not just an advantageous coincidence, becomes clear from the following remark: "Quelqu'un qui se cache ne peut pas se montrer dans des grandes agglomérations." (TT in Int. 22/11/91).

<sup>7</sup> Although inconvenient, the entrance via the ancestral hut was thought to serve in a double preventive way: In case of an unwelcome visit, people would gain some time, and flee over the back wall before the adversary had climbed down to the inner court yard. Moreover, it was expected that ancestral spirits, residing in and worshipped at small altars on either side of the hut, would detect and immediately punish any ill intent by sending a fatal disease, striking down the adversary even before he could reach the upper window. With the pacification of the region, customs have changed. Nowadays, a compound can be entered, in a more ordinary fashion, through a large aperture in the surrounding wall.

<sup>8</sup> In the old days, part of the education in the initiation camp consisted in the teaching of fighting skills and the formation of small corps (Balle 1987/88: 67-69).

not too difficult, since France, having settled the disputes with Germany over the common border with Togoland to the west, displayed little interest in the region. Compared to the demographically and economically powerful south, the upper north-west with its dense forests, extensive agriculture and a low population density was hardly attractive. Only as late as 1910, were the first serious efforts made to govern this remote part of the country. The *cercle de l'Atakora* was created and divided into four *cantons*, those of Kuandé, Natitingou, Tanguiéta and Boukoubé (Tiando 1987: page d). (The system was later altered, and the administrative units renamed following the changes in the French model). The more the new regime gained control over the area and the more it made its presence felt, the more difficult it became for the indigenous population to simply withdraw. Tension mounted and violent encounters occurred increasingly until in 1914, parts of the Atakora population, including the Berba, pooled forces under the leadership of their local hero Kaba and began to rise up in revolt against the French. Despite their military strength, however, it took the French over two years to finally put down the rebellion in the bloody battle of Orou-Kayo in 1916 and re-establish their authority. After it was clear that open resistance would not lead to the desired result, people returned to their old habits and tried to evade foreign influence where possible, through disobedience, reluctance to co-operate or by disappearing. Once more, it was due to the negligent attitude of the colonial government, whose main activity (after the brief interlude in 1914-16), was the recruitment of soldiers for military engagements abroad, that the strategy of withdrawal operated well and traditional structures remained relatively undisturbed.<sup>9</sup> The situation changed, slightly, when Dahomey became independent in 1960, and ambitious plans were made to reorganize and modernize the new nation state. Particular attention was paid to the Atakora, which was viewed as the most 'savage' and uncontrollable part of the country. People were forced to change their dress habits (European clothes had to replace the traditional aprons made from leather or leaves) as well as to give up their isolated farms and settle together in scattered villages.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Berba soldiers were conscripted in the Second World War to serve in Algeria and Indonesia.

<sup>10</sup> The intention was to gain better control of the area and facilitate its administration. Yet this first *movement de regroupement*, organized in 1962, proved to be an almost

Yet, on the whole, these efforts were met with little success, since internal political turmoil soon began to weaken the young nation state, and, with one *coup d'état* following the other, it was not possible to pursue a consistent policy, let alone control the implementation of singular measures in some remote part of the country. If local life changed during those years, it was so less as a result of administrative efforts, than from increasing mobility and the importation of new goods and ideas, reaching the area through migrant labour, missionaries or, later, development organisations.<sup>11</sup>

It was only in 1972, that significant changes began to take place with a *coup d'état*, led by General M. Kérékou, and the establishment of a one-party system of Marxist-Leninist orientation. One of the primary goals was the consolidation and reorganisation of the country, renamed the 'People's Republic of Benin' (1975). Much energy thereafter went into the restructuring of the Atakora.<sup>12</sup> The administration was refined and the implementation of state law more rigidly controlled. The education system was improved with the foundation of elementary schools and colleges, and the production of cash crops for the national market encouraged. Moreover, in propagating Marxist ideals, the government took measures to intensify political life on a local level. The intention was to shape an identity that went beyond kinship ties and ethnic boundaries, as well as to facilitate the control of the region. Amongst other rules, it became compulsory to hold village assemblies at regular intervals and report their results to the mayor or the sub-prefect. In the same vein, a second (and much more successful) *mouvement de groupement* took place in 1982, and new markets were founded to encourage trading activities and foster exchanges between different regions.<sup>13</sup>

In 1991, after almost twenty years of socialism, N. Soglo became the first democratically elected president and introduced the country to the free market

---

complete failure. After only two years, most of the villagers had already left their new homes, and returned to their old farms out in the bush.

<sup>11</sup> The catholic mission arrived as early as 1960 in the region.

<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly, Kérékou's personal background was influential in this respect. He is a Natemba from the village of Kotopounga (*département de l'Atacora*) and one of the few '*fils de terre*' ever to attain such powerful position.

<sup>13</sup> Although this movement, due to the independent-mindedness of the Berba, was still not an overwhelming success, nowadays, in most villages, at least some 50% of the population dwell together in a clearly defined centre.



economy. To the Berba, this meant not only a loosening of state control, but also being more strongly involved in, and affected by the mechanisms of a capitalist-monetary system. It remains to be seen what the coming years will bring after M. Kérékou's re-election as president in 1996, this time propagating nationalist-capitalist ideas.

In sum, contrary to commonly held views, the secluded life of the Berba, as well as their unruly conduct, is neither the product of long-lasting isolation nor proof of backwardness, but the expression of a strong commitment to independence and self-determination, which does not allow for submission to a superior force.<sup>14</sup> Thanks to diverse defence strategies and helped by the fact that foreign powers were much less interested in the government of the area than in its economic exploitation, the local population was able to preserve its traditional way of life (Balle 1987/88: 69). It was as late as 1972, when, with the take over by Kérékou, a period of more profound changes set in. But even then, despite the imposition of new administrative structures and tighter rule by the state government, basic principles and values survived, and continue to inform local politics and life to this day. We must hence begin with an outline of the traditional form of social and political organisation if we are to comprehend the present day situation.

## **2. Traditional political organisation**

In 1946, Anatole Cyossi, an elementary school teacher from Tanguieta, comments on the Berba and notes the difficulties the state administration had in dealing with them: "Indomptables – affirment les Tiokossis et les Baribas qui ont tenté de les dominer [...] leur caractère altier les fait passer pour rebelles et imperfectibles". In seeking an explanation for their obstinate nature, he points to their political ethos which would not allow for the subordination to a superior power: "Le Berba n'admet l'autorité d'aucun chef et prétend vivre à sa guise, la loi de la force primant les autres. Cet esprit individualiste va jusqu'à exclure les chefs religieux." (1946: 137). It was this notion of an 'esprit individualiste'

---

<sup>14</sup> An indirect proof for the tenacity of these principles is the fact that despite being surrounded by stratified societies no chiefdom has ever developed.

which soon led to the common view that people in the Atakora were lacking any form of political order at all. To many, this 'anarchy' was just one more proof of the backwardness and low cultural evolution of this remote part of the country. Yet, as Tiando rightly remarks, this would not explain the efficacy of the Berbas' resistance against any foreign domination; on the contrary, it suggested at least some form of political organisation and the existence of a common ideal which was worth defending.<sup>15</sup> How can we then describe a society which provides a framework for political action, yet is marked by the absence of any central power?

Berba society can best be described as segmentary or acephalous.<sup>16</sup> It is predicated upon the idea that "there is no single person or body of persons vested with supreme executive and administrative authority (...) Government is laterally distributed amongst all the corporate units that make up the society, instead of being vertically distributed as in pyramidal societies. All the corporate units are, broadly speaking, politically equal; all are segments of the same structural order." (Fortes 1945: 232). The basic corporate unit, which also represents the basic judicial unit, is comprised of the patrilineal descent group. The relationship between these segments is characterized by political equality. No group can exercise legitimate power over other segment groups.<sup>17</sup> Yet, what Bohannan notes for the Tiv also applies to the Berba: "It is these (exogamous) groups and not the individual which form the unit of (...) society", which means that "all groups are in theory equal, but not all men." (1954: 87) Thus, while the relation between different descent groups is based on the principle of equality, on the individual level we find a stratification system which

<sup>15</sup> Compare Tiando: "Il ne serait pas alors absurde d'affirmer que malgré leur disparité les modes d'articulation et de fonctionnement de ces sociétés ne se réduisent pas à un individualisme foncier, mais qu'ils postulent une possibilité de regroupement en vue de la défense d'un idéal commun.." (1987: page j).

<sup>16</sup> Compare Evan-Pritchard and his notion of an 'acephalous kinship state' (1940: 181).

<sup>17</sup> Although some principles may sound familiar, I hesitate to use the term 'democratic', as some authors do with reference to segmentary systems (Balle 1987/88: 65) since it is, firstly, a concept which has been developed in the Western world and connotes not only a social structure but also a certain attitude (citizenship, voting etc.), and secondly, would imply that 'equality' includes all adult members of a society, while in Berba ideology the notion of 'equality' is more complex, and relates first and foremost to different segments as well as members of the same age group and the same sex.

cuts across kinship boundaries and defines the relationships of members not only within, but also between, the different segments. Pivotal here (apart from gender) is the notion of 'social age'. It is defined with the *kundi*, the initiation ceremony, which marks the end of childhood and assigns an adult status to the individual as well as full membership in Berba society. From then on, the initiate will be superior to any non-initiate, equal to his fellows in *kundi*, and inferior to those who have been initiated before him. Attached to this status is a set of rights and obligations, which provides a frame of reference for interpersonal relations within and beyond kinship boundaries. Yet to be clear, the existence of such inner hierarchy does not mean that we are dealing with a pyramidal society. First of all, the notion of inferiority or superiority is less a question of supreme authority than one of respect. As we will see below, an elder may act as an authority, yet he has little ability to demand obedience if there are serious doubts about his competence to perform the role associated with his status. And secondly – to come back to the beginning – what the system does *not* feature is an institutionalized supreme power (whether a group or an individual).

So far, we have been dealing with the *model* of Berba society. It is 'elementary' for it provides the template of structures and principles, according to which social and political life is organized and from which social and moral values flow. Yet, as a number of authors rightly observe, some modifications must be made, when it comes to the description of everyday life. This concerns, in particular, the notion of 'equality', which, after all, is an ideal and not easily compatible with the natural diversity found in any society. People are born into different conditions, are bestowed with different gifts and talents, and follow different ambitions. From very early on, therefore, imbalances in power-relationships have been noted, which occur on various levels. A. Richards in investigating the relationships between different segments, concludes that "the more we learn of segmentary societies, the more we realize that it is the exception rather than the rule for clans and lineages to have an exactly equal status." (1960: 176). C. Sigrist, in turn, points at unequal relationships between individuals, which he ascribes to a human disposition to aspire to leadership (1967: 159-60). Berba society is no exception to the rule, with imbalances of

power-relationships on each level. This however, does not undermine, but on the contrary, affirms and substantiates the model, as is shown in the following paragraph in which two such imbalances will be discussed. Not only does it illustrate the operating mechanism of a segmentary system, but it also helps to understand the kind of relationship which prevails today between the local population and the state administration.

The first instance of inequality is the *tinhyau* or earth priest. He is the representative of the founder clan of a village or local community and in this rôle is responsible for the cult of the *tikyani* or *labwoi hwangi*, a supernatural force which is thought to 'own' and protect the land.<sup>18</sup> Its particular relationship with the clan dates from the early days of settlement, when the clan's forebear set up its cult place in the bush and offered it the first sacrifice. The importance of a *tinhyau* derives from his intermediary function between the supernatural and the mundane world. It is only through him, that a community can obtain the blessings for a successful farming year and procure help and protection in times of hardship. Moreover, only he can approach the *tikyani* in the name of newcomers, and ask permission to settle in the area.

The second figure, taking an unusually powerful position, is the *bega*, a kind of 'big man'.<sup>19</sup> His power derives from considerable wealth and the support of numerous followers, both of which are the outcome of auspicious circumstances, personal gifts and a large family which secures him a strong labour force and a wide network of kin relations. From this position he can exert at least some pressure on others, either indirectly, by virtue of his economic strength, or through direct action by an executive force, recruited from among his followers.

---

<sup>18</sup> A *tinhyau* is determined by auspices. Although it is usually an elder, it would also be possible, according to informants, that the auspices would indicate a very young member of the clan. Whoever is chosen, once a *tinhyau* is appointed, elders who have already collaborated with his predecessor will introduce him to the main secrets and rituals.

<sup>19</sup> We also find the term *begau*.

How do people deal with these obvious 'imbalances in power relationships'? How are they reconcilable with the guiding principles of a segmentary system? To answer this question, we have to first examine the notions of power and authority as they emerge from the outline above. The power of a *tinhyau* can be said to be based on 'positional authority' (Schäfers 1986: 169). It derives from a ritual monopoly and is sanctioned by a supernatural force. Due to his mediating function between the *tikyani* and the local community, he can expect a certain amount of respect and obedience from the members of the community. Also, he may issue orders, organize communal action or suggest social sanctions beyond his clan segment. Yet his authority is by no means absolute, for he is not vested with a supreme executive or legislative power by which he could enforce decisions on the people. The ultimate power rests with the *tikyani*. Overall, his role is that of a ritual expert whose authority greatly depends on his ability to accomplish the duties attached to his position and act on behalf of the local community. If he fails to meet their expectations, people may ignore his orders or even move away.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike a *tinhyau*, whose authority is positional, the big man's power is personal and thus suspect in every respect. It is neither understandable in view of the given living conditions, for others share the same conditions as well, nor is it acceptable in terms of the principles governing a segmentary society. The only way to explain his 'extra-ordinary' stand is to assume the aid of some supernatural force.<sup>21</sup> It is common belief that a *bega* is backed by *tibu*, a magical substance (e.g. charms, objects, poison), which he has purchased

---

<sup>20</sup> Due to a low population density, sufficient land and flexible residence rules, mobility has been very high (it still is despite a growing population and increasing land shortage). The Berba practise patri-, viri- and uxorilocal residence. It is convenience, the availability of land and personal preference which are the deciding factors. The following statement is typical in this regard: "Je suis libre. Si cela ne me plaît pas chez mes parents, je vais rester chez ma belle-famille." (1995, II: 166-67) Moreover, it is not uncommon to find that people join their mother's brothers, a phenomenon which explains itself by the special relation that prevails between a mother's brother and his sister's son. Amongst other things, the uncle is obliged to allot his nephew a piece of land when asked for it.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Sigrist (1967: 192).

'abroad' and which endows him with *bansem*, i.e. uncontrollable superior power.

In investigating the underlying principles of a segmentary system, Sigrist suggests that the preservation of the social and political order is based on a mechanism of 'self-regulation (*Selbststeuerung*)' (1967: 112-18).<sup>22</sup> Any instance of deviant behaviour, such as the disregard of mutual obligations or the attempt to enforce one's will on others, will be met with opposition from the community, which subsequently tries to reorient the individual towards desirable behaviour through either psychological, material and physical sanctions or through ostracism. Since a *bega* represents a clear instance of 'deviation from the norm', his community is likely to react in just this way and attempt to exert social pressure on him. Yet his potency is such that most measures are bound to fail (if unfortunate circumstances do not cause his decline otherwise). His followers protect him against physical sanctions, whereas material sanctions are pointless in view of his economic strength. Equally, the use of magical devices such as the activation of supernatural forces is doubtful, since part of his strength derives from a foreign-made and uncontrollable charm, which has proved to be extremely powerful. There is one means, however, which is relatively effective and therefore plays an important role in the process of self-regulation. It is the threat to 'opt out' and limit the *bega*'s sphere of influence by either denying him any further support or moving away from the local community (if his pressure becomes too strong and the situation untenable). Yet to describe the relationship between the *bega* and the local population as necessarily strained would convey a one-sided view. Despite his 'a-normal' power, a *bega* may also be a highly regarded figure, held in high esteem and widely respected. To comprehend this attitude, we have to bear in mind, that it is not his wealth or influence *per se* that is in contention but rather the exploitation of his rôle for illicit ends, above all the attainment of a supreme position and the domination of others. His economic and political power will not be questioned, however, as long as it is utilized to the advantage of others,

---

<sup>22</sup> Compare the notion of 'levelling tendencies' in Geschiere (1982: 3).

by generously sharing his wealth, acting in a just and wise manner, affording protection to the needy, and for all that, remaining modest and moderate. In other words, it is his conduct as an *exemplary* member of a segmentary society which accords him leadership qualities and translates his personal power into legitimate authority (*primus inter pares*). What Firth notes for Tikopia leadership thus also holds for the Berba case: "people *choose* to obey their chiefs." (1975: 34, emphasis by the author). This logic also applies to any other form of temporary leadership such as a hunting chief or a war lord.

Despite some instances of imbalances in power-relationships, then, the governing principles of a segmentary society can be said to remain untouched. Positional and personal authority are only tolerated as long as they do not undermine the system itself or lead to the establishment of an institutionalized central power. If this occurs a mechanism of self-regulation comes into operation, which aims at the sanctioning of such ambitions and the reorientation of the individual towards the line of expected behaviour. Bearing in mind the vigour with which the Berba have defended their traditional way of life against foreign domination, it is interesting to look at the way in which they now live as part of a nation state, and how they organize themselves within the superimposed state administration.

### **3. The Berba and the state administration**

The administrative structure of the Republic of Benin is modelled on the French system. The largest administrative unit is the province (*département*), which is subdivided into sub-prefectures (*sous-préfecture*), districts (*communautés rurales et urbaines*), villages (*village/ quartier*) and/ or hamlets (*hameau*). Berbaland is almost identical with the sub-prefecture Matéri (province Atakora, capital Natitingou). It numbers six districts and 56 villages. Its administration is in Matéri, a 'town' of approximately 12 000 inhabitants, situated in the centre of the sub-prefecture.<sup>23</sup> The attitude of the local population towards the state officials can best be understood when we take a look at the nature of their power and authority, as perceived from an indigenous point of view:

---

<sup>23</sup> Only an estimated 10% live outside the sub-prefecture in neighbouring Togo and Burkina Faso.

DD: "Tu as 40 ans et l'autre 25 ans, tu le considères comme (un) enfant, mais tu seras obligé de lui obéir, parce qu'il est élu et il vient au nom de sa place, comme les gendarmes, le maire. Ils ont *bansəm*, la loi leur permet d'agir comme ça." (Int. 14/03/96).<sup>24</sup>

A key term is the notion of *bansəm*. It has already figured in the discussion on the position of a big man, where it has been defined as any form of superior power which is uncontrollable and hence dangerous or futile to oppose. While in the *bega'* s case, *bansəm* is thought to derive from *tibu*, a magical means, it is 'the state' as a superimposed system, which invests its representatives with supreme authority. Empowered by their rôle within the system, and backed by an institutional apparatus (legislature and an executive force) they no longer have to observe guiding principles of traditional policy, and can impose decisions on others, even on those who are many times their elder. In the face of the irrefutable power of the new order, it is futile to try to oppose the system as such. Instead, one has to reconcile oneself to the given situation and find other ways to limit the sway of the new rulers, or to influence it where possible. In dealing with state officials the Berba have developed various strategies which differ according to administrative rank and social distance of the incumbent. The highest ranking official in the region is the sub-prefect. As a member of the educated elite in the south, he is neither familiar with the local language nor with native customs and concerns. Moreover, few sub-prefects make little effort to truly concern themselves with local affairs, since a transfer to this remote part of the country is highly unpopular among civil servants, and most sub-prefects tend to get away from this region as soon as possible. The attitude towards the sub-prefect is marked by suspicion and reservation. He is viewed as the embodiment of a superior power over which they have little influence. The Berba will hence try to keep their distance (which is not too difficult since personal contact is rare) and rather concentrate on those who are responsible for the implementation of orders at the local level (the mayors on the level of the district council, and the heads of the villages/ village wards (*chef du village/ quartier*)).

---

<sup>24</sup> The French 'autorité' is translated with *haneli i bansəm*, the 'place of power'.



A mayor is democratically elected by the district population and serves as intermediary between the local communities and the sub-prefect. In this capacity, he organizes meetings with the village representatives, where he gives information about new laws or projects, debates current issues and receives complaints which he will then lodge with the sub-prefect. Also, he acts as a judge in affairs arising at the district level. Yet, his means for enforcing a decision are limited. With a rather weak executive force to support him – only two police officers to more than 60 000 inhabitants – the only way to lend weight to his words is to threaten with sanctions on a higher administrative level.<sup>25</sup> His intermediate position between local population and state administration renders attitudes towards him rather ambiguous. While people approach him more easily and try to influence the decision-making process where possible (e.g. by critique or denial of support), they also see in him the state official, who is backed by a superior power, and hence will obey if it seems more astute.

On the lowest administrative level, we find the village head. He is democratically elected by the members of the local community. His duties include the representation of the community at assemblies on the level of the district council, the communication of official orders to the villagers, and the settlement of conflicts on the village level. Already the term *bega* for village head reveals much about his status in his community. As a representative, who is most distant from the governing body (in terms of both rank and contact) he is viewed and treated according to the principles of the traditional political

---

<sup>25</sup> The weakness of the police force is indeed remarkable, not only in regard to the low recruitment figures, but also in the sway of the police officers over the local population (although they are feared for they represent the executive power of superior rule). The Berba pride themselves in having made (and still make) life difficult for them by violently responding towards any attempt to prosecute or arrest them. Moreover, their means of transport are rather limited (the only vehicle at their disposal is a motorbike) with the effect that police officers are rarely seen in the villages. Most often, they learn about infringements of law from the village heads or the mayors and will then try to convene the parties in Matéri. They may act in a reconciliatory function in civil law cases, but have no judicial or executive powers. It is only recently that the authority of the police officers seems have increased, a phenomenon which can be related to social changes and generational conflicts, in which the state is no longer regarded as an adversary but as an alternative power which is strong enough to oppose customary law (see paragraph on conflict management).

ideology. People obey and support him as long as he uses his superior position for the sake, and not at the expense, of the community. He is expected to remain modest, act justly and wisely, defend the village interests before the mayor and the sub-prefect and assure social peace. Otherwise, people will apply proven strategies of resistance and withdrawal (refusal to co-operate, the boycott of village assemblies and public ridicule) in order to force him back to the line of expected behaviour. We must not forget that due to his low rank and the lack of an immediately available executive force (the police station is far away in Matéri) the coercive power of a village head is fairly low. Moreover, as a villager he is not only a representative but also a member of the community, which means that he is bound to it by a multitude of kin and friendship relations, which renders his situation even more vulnerable. If he resists and relies on his role as state official, there is always the option to beat him with his own weapons and threaten not to re-elect him after five years.<sup>26</sup>

The attitude towards the state representatives varies according to rank and social distance. The higher ranking the incumbent and the closer his association with state rule, the more people tend to draw on evasive strategies or bow to the inevitable and obey. The lower ranking the incumbent and the stronger his attachment to the local culture, the more likely it is that he will be treated according to the governing principles of traditional rule, namely that of a segmentary society. It can therefore be said that, in spite of the superior state government, the Berba have found different ways to limit or influence its rule, most particularly so on the local level. For an investigation of contemporary local politics, this means that we are dealing with communities whose social and political life is still largely informed by values and principles of a segmentary system.

---

<sup>26</sup> Since 1994 a *begau* receives a regular monthly income of 5000 CFA, a mayor 10 000 CFA. Additionally, he can demand 250 CFA from each party for the holding of a local *jugement* (mayor 500 CFA). Apart from other advantages, it is therefore also of financial interest to keep the position as long as possible.

#### 4. Village policy

A *syeli* or village constitutes the most common settlement unit in Berbaland. Despite its somewhat amorphous appearance, with individual compounds loosely grouped around a market place, and seemingly disconnected, its territory is clearly defined. In size it ranges from 100-2000 inhabitants. While in former times, a *syeli* often consisted of one single descent group and its affiliates, it now comprises a wide range of different clans and lineages, dwelling on the same territory and sharing the same local identity. Paraphrased in the idioms of a segmentary system, it can be said that a *syeli* is built around co-existing segments whose relationship is marked by political equality. How does it then function as a social and political community? What are the principles and practices of its policy? More specifically, how are decision-making and the maintenance of social order – the two principal domains of a policy – organized? In answering these questions I will, first, outline traditional values and principles of Berba customary law, and secondly, examine how far they have been retained in a changing social and political environment.

##### 4.1. Decision-making and consensus orientation

In a segmentary society, the principal means of developing and deciding on a communal policy is by consensus and public debate: representatives of the different descent groups come together in order to discuss and resolve current problems by working out a communal strategy. Since (ideally) no one can impose his will on others, the aim must be the reaching of a consensus. Only then is it likely that the decision will actually be implemented for it has the support of the entire group (or at least the major part of it). As far as the present situation is concerned, little has changed. The decision-making process is still governed by the principles of a segmentary order. Despite a new inner stratification of most convening bodies – the majority of gatherings are now held by interest groups that are modelled on French action committees with a president, treasurer etc. – there is in fact no one who can enforce a decision on others. Even a village head, although holding the highest office and presiding at

most of the assemblies, has little means to dictate his will, since, to the local population he is nothing but a *primus inter pares* and therefore depends on their agreement and active support to actually implement a decision (see above). What has changed, however, is the importance and frequency of public debate. As will be detailed in the following chapter, changes in the social and political environment have led to a multiplication of communal activities which in turn is accompanied by an increase in public debate.

#### 4.2. Conflict management and the principle of conciliation

Although lacking an institutionalized legislature and judiciary, the Berba constitute a 'legal community' with a commonly acknowledged corpus of customary law and approved practices of conflict management.<sup>27</sup> In the traditional legal system two main modes of conflict settlement on an inter-segmental level can be distinguished. They are *kyanahu* (arbitration) and *yabwotu* (litigation).

##### 4.2.1 Arbitration

Let us assume, a conflict arises and one side recognizes his/ her wrongdoing. He will ask a 'wise person' (a *hirəkyau/ pəkyau* or a *yamfutyau*, see below) to 'go and apologize' (*bə ten tamə*), i.e. to go to the victim, ask forgiveness and negotiate the compensation. This mediation can be accomplished in a couple of days, yet, may also last as long as five or ten years, depending on the gravity of the case and the willingness to forgive. The affair is finally sealed off by a (public) reconciliation where each party is called upon to relate his/ her version of the case, confirm the kind and amount of compensation, and, most importantly, apologize and forgive the other. The session is closed by a libation to witches and ancestors and a ritual drink from the same calabash.

---

<sup>27</sup> They constitute what Sigrüst drawing on the legal philosopher Theodor Geiger calls a 'society of incomplete law'. He notes: Segmentäre Gesellschaften besitzen also alle Merkmale, die die Bezeichnung als "Rechtsgesellschaften" rechtfertigen, mit Ausnahme des einen: der Zentralinstanz und ihrer rechtlichen Kompetenzen: Verhängungs- und Vollstreckungsmonopol." (1967: 107).

#### 4.2.2. Litigation

Let us assume, that neither party recognizes his/ her guilt, or recognizes it but makes no move to offer his/ her apologies, then wise elders are asked to intervene and settle the conflict. A trial will be arranged where a board of 'judges' hear the quarrelling parties, examine witnesses and finally come up with a verdict, which has then to be audibly accepted by both parties. Usually, the session is followed by a communal drink..

So far, we have concentrated on procedural aspects, as they are typical for a system where there is no judiciary that could impose a verdict on others. To fully comprehend the different modes of conflict resolution, however, we need to contemplate another domain and introduce a concept which accounts for much not only of the course but also of the general nature of traditional legal proceedings. I am referring here to the possibility of taking the law in to one's own hands, either by physical aggression, magical spells, the use of poison or, as one of the most feared devices, by activating *hwangi* and *dwangetu*.<sup>28</sup> While *hwangi* connote local spirits which are thought to reside in stones or trees out in the bush and act on behalf of those lineages dwelling on their territory, *dwangetu* is the generic term for the ancestors of the patrilineage who are worshipped in the *sehu* or ancestral hut. Now, any adult Berba who feels unjustly treated can activate the ill energies of these spirits by beating their altar (i.e. waking them up), lodging his complaint with them and asking for revenge. Although the beating is done in secret, it may publicly be announced by a furious "*a nyambil!*" ("You will see!"). From then onwards, it is prohibited to eat and drink with the cursed person. Otherwise the curse will fall back on the complainant himself. The choice of the spirit is determined by the nature of the problem. Any conflict, for example, which arises from the complex marriage system (sister exchange) and concerns mother's brothers and sister's sons, is

---

<sup>28</sup> In the following discussion I will use *dwangetu* interchangeably with 'ancestors'. As far as *hwangi* is concerned, it is commonly translated with the French 'fétiche'. I will keep to its generic name, for both the French term and its English equivalent 'fetish' bear heavy connotations from other discourses and do not seem suitable to serve as an analytical concept in an academic discussion.

most likely to involve *nyou pə sanu hwangi*, the *hwangi* which is responsible for the matrilineage. The activity of both *hwangi* and *dwangetu* is greatly feared. Hundreds of stories circulate where people have suffered from bad luck, illness or even death following the manipulation of the spirits by an angered neighbour or relative.<sup>29</sup> The only means to avert further misery is by getting the person to return to the spirit and withdraw the curse in a ritual called *swotəm* or *bə swote nui* ('washing the mouth').<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion, a number of points can be made as regards the nature and procedural aspects of the two principal means of conflict resolution. As the outline readily shows, the principal aim of both events is not to convict and punish, but to reconcile the quarrelling parties. This goal is achieved, when both parties publicly declare their acceptance of the verdict, agree to bury their differences and demonstrate their (restored) good relations by drinking from the same calabash. In accordance with this concept, the intervening parties act less as judges than as arbitrators. This is most obvious in conciliation proceedings, where legal positions are clear from the onset and the intermediary only has to negotiate the conditions of a satisfactory settlement. In a litigation, things are not as evident. A board of 'judges' convenes, presides at and directs the course of the event, and may even come up with a verdict. We should not forget, however, that we are dealing here with an authoritative position in the Berba sense of the word. People may (temporarily) hold a superior place, yet not by virtue of an office, but on entitlement by their subjects, who regard them as

---

<sup>29</sup> While a *dwangetu* is held responsible for sickness or bad luck, a *hwangi* is thought to cause more serious harm, a severe accident or even death. An interesting aspect in this regard is the wide-spread belief that a *dwangetu* will check on the justness of the complaint before carrying out the revenge. The concept of a 'precautionary' act becomes comprehensible when we call to mind that the people a *dwangetu* is put on are often members of the lineage which it is to protect. To cause harm is hence a serious act which must carefully be considered beforehand. Some informants also hold that in the case of an unjustified complaint the curse will fall back on its author.

<sup>30</sup> This is, however, only the last step, preceded by a prolonged phase of detecting the initiator of the curse and getting him to apologize. As so often in Berba culture, the case is more often than not opened from the end, the fact of misery being the first evidence for the activity of a spirit, which must then be diagnosed and detected by a healer. It can, however, also be made clearer by someone obviously warning the other with "you'll see!"

particularly qualified to accomplish a certain task. Quarrelling parties make a request to elders to settle a conflict which they cannot resolve by themselves. Lacking positional authority and executive power, a judge, however, has no means to impose a verdict on others and enforce its public recognition. It always is possible to leave the hearing at an earlier stage and to continue the dispute. Rather than ordering the parties to bury their differences, a judge, backed by his legal expertise and persuasive talents, will try to mediate between them and work out a solution which is to their mutual satisfaction.<sup>31</sup>

The emphasis on conciliation and mediation is not only explained by the logic of a segmentary system but also by the practice of arbitration law through activating supernatural powers. In the indigenous view, even though there are means to impose a verdict, it would not help to restore peace forcibly, since it is assumed that if one party feels unjustly treated, he/ she would pay lip-service to the verdict, but on returning home, would call upon *hwangi* or *dwangetu* and ask for revenge. The belief in the effectiveness of this form of arbitration law also influences the choice of the respective mode of conflict resolution and accounts for certain elements in the proceedings. While a trial is usually held with the intention to settle an affair *before* it escalates and supernatural powers are involved, a conciliation often marks the final stage in a history of conflict and retaliatory action. It is initiated when a spirit's activity is suspected or has been diagnosed by a *tibau* after misfortune has struck. Here, the aim is to avert or stop a harmful prosecution and re-establish good relations. The belief system also explains the importance of forgiving in public and sharing a drink together. Apart from binding people to their word, the public acceptance of an apology serves as evidence of the non-involvement of any supernatural agents: according to local belief, the ill energy of a spirit will fall back on the originator of a curse, if good relations have been restored, but the curse has not yet been withdrawn.

---

<sup>31</sup> Compare the remark by SK, a *hirakyau* from Kwarehu: "(Une reconciliation est indispensable) parce qu'on a peur que les individus se fassent du mal, lancent le gris-gris, tapent le fétiche [...] Après (la reconciliation) ils peuvent se saluer. On peut lancer le mauvais sort à quelqu'un en voulant sa vie. Mais maintenant, ils sont réconciliés, ils peuvent manger ensemble. Quand il y a un grand problème, ils ne mangent pas ensemble. Si tu ne manges pas ensemble avec quelqu'un et tu le vois ici, tu dois aller de l'autre côté (i.e. will not greet him). Donc, si l'affaire n'est pas réglée et vous vivez de cette manière, ce n'est pas bon." (Int. 13/05/95).

In a similar vein, the ritual drink serves to defuse the fear of any retaliatory action. To drink from the same calabash is regarded as one of the most obvious signs of friendly relations (next to eating from the same bowl or greeting each other). Apart from practical aspects (to share the same drink means that it is not poisoned), it also warrants that there is no hidden rancour on either side, for it is prohibited to eat or drink with the person whom one has cursed. In the context of conflict resolution, a ritual drink therefore marks the ultimate conciliation of a case, for it means that no spirit is involved whether it has never been activated or the curse has been withdrawn. Overall, then, customary law employs important means of conflict resolution, which centre around mediation and conciliation. We must not forget, however, that we are dealing with proceedings which are neither institutionalized nor backed by an executive power. Their success mainly builds on the willingness of the opposing parties to bury their differences. Otherwise, there is always the possibility of taking the law into one's own hands and retaliating by other means.

The integration into a nation state has also brought about changes in the legal domain. Superimposed on the customary law is the state law, with its own legislative and judicial structure. On the level of *village* and *commune* we find 'courts', composed of the head of the respective community and 3-6 elected wise elders, who are in charge of civil law cases, yet have no executive power. This rests with the district court in Natitingou, where cases are tried and where the penal institutions are situated. The attitude towards the state law is ambiguous. On the one hand, people recognize the need, if not the advantage of accepting the imposed legal system, at least in some domains. On the other hand, however, there are many cases where people prefer to settle an affair in a customary manner even if it runs counter to guiding rules. This ambiguity is most evident in the different attitudes towards criminal and civil law. Criminal law cases, most importantly assaults or murder cases, are registered by the police before they are transferred to and tried in Natitingou. The state intervention in the domain of criminal law is relatively widely accepted. This is for two reasons: Firstly, the fact of a case being transferred to and treated on the district level has an extremely intimidating effect. It underscores the



seriousness of the case, and demonstrates the superiority of the state as well as its determination to prosecute any infringement in this domain. Any opposition on this level would be futile. Secondly, homicide ranks as one of the worst offences not only in state but also in customary law. Apart from violating the 'right to life', it also marks the beginning of a serious and enduring conflict between the involved families (including physical violence and the spirits' activity) which can only be settled by complicated proceedings. In view of the trouble which emerges from homicide, the state law is widely regarded as a welcome alternative to customary law, and the imposition of order is willingly accepted, since it helps to avoid further damage. One important element from customary law has been retained, nonetheless. It is the dangerous ritual of *bə dwosi tihə* ('repairing the earth'), which can only be performed by powerful elders, and marks the ultimate stage in the conciliation between the families and the restoration of peace.

In civil law cases, which constitute the vast majority of all suits, the acceptance of the legal structures imposed by the state is much less developed. This attitude becomes comprehensible if we consider the nature of the lawsuits. Most of them emerge out of an infringement of customary law. Customary law, in turn, informs the local sense of justice. The problem, now, rests with the fact that people still refer to superhuman agents to retaliate against suffered injustice. A civil law case must hence be *thoroughly* settled in the sense described above. This implies that an arbiter must have a profound knowledge of both customary law and local history in order to pass a just verdict, and see the ultimate goal in a conciliation not a judgement.<sup>32</sup> To satisfactorily accomplish this task, however, representatives of the state law are often ill prepared. The higher their rank, the less acquainted they are with local customs and past events, and the stronger their tendency to display their positional

---

<sup>32</sup> Compare the insightful remark by EI, since 1996 head of a village ward of Matéri, who critically comments on his task as a 'judge' in the local court: "Chez les paysans, si quelqu'un a raison, il faut lui donner raison. Si tu lui donnes raison, c'est même plus que lui donner 100 000 CFA. Mais si tu lui dis qu'il n'a pas raison, alors qu'il sait qu'il a raison, parce qu'il a peur de toi, là, il va refuser. Il serait contraint d'accepter devant toi, mais arrivé à la maison, il va faire du mal [...] Il va dire: "Bon, si je n'ai pas raison, on va voir!" (Int. 17/05/96).

authority and keep to the application of state law.<sup>33</sup> For legal practice this means that most people still prefer to call on the *bureau des sages* and resolve their conflicts on the village level in a more or less customary way.<sup>34</sup>

In sum then, despite significant changes in the political environment and integration in a nation state, Berba society has not changed fundamentally. The principles and values of a segmentary system are still valid and continue to inform social and political life, mostly so on the village level, where the power and authority of the government officials is weakest. Accordingly, the guiding principles of local politics are consensus-orientation in the decision-making process, and mediation in the legal domain. One characteristic feature of these communities is their potential fragility. Social peace is easily disturbed by internal power struggles or imbalances in power relations. The restoration of order usually involves lengthy proceedings, and in the case of insoluble differences or unacceptable claims to leadership, there is always the option to boycott social life or entirely withdraw and weaken the community by moving away.

---

<sup>33</sup> We should bear in mind that we are dealing with a predominantly oral society where few means exist to testify to past events. One of them is to call on witnesses, who experienced the affair. This explains the preference for elderly arbiters, who, despite not having experienced every event personally, have nonetheless gained a sound knowledge of local history during their lifetime. The importance of cultural competence can best be illustrated with the tradition of bride-exchange (next to disputes over land this is the main centre of conflict). The system is built on the rule that mother's brothers and brothers can exchange their niece or sister against a girl out of another lineage, whom they wish to marry. Marriageable men who have no sister or sister's daughter frequently make 'debts' by either asking a 'loan' (i.e. a girl) from a friend or relative in order to start a transaction, or by marrying 'on credit', i.e. by promising a girl in return at a later stage. Whatever the arrangement, there are now 'debts' which must be paid back which means that girls, born in a later generation, are given in compensation to the respective families. This complicated system gives rise to innumerable conflicts, which most often centre around the fact that descendants are unwilling to pay back their ancestors' debts. To satisfactorily settle such a case, someone perfectly acquainted with both customary marriage law and past transactions is a *sine qua non*.

<sup>34</sup> To emphasize the prevalence of traditional values and principles is not to deny gradual changes which take place in this domain. An increasing number of younger people, for example, regard the state law as a welcome opportunity to break up old hierarchies and oppose the older generation. Also, there are some community heads who attempt to convince people of the value of the state jurisdiction, particularly in conflicts which concern the bride-exchange system. Last but not least, changes in the social and economic environment require new forms of expertise, such as literacy, which in turn privileges the younger generation.

## 5. Berba ethics

So far, the discussion has focused on structural aspects of Berba social and political organisation. Yet there is more to a social order than just structure. There must also be some orientation as to how to translate it into (social) practice. To give a full picture of Berba society, then, we have to consider its ethics, or the indigenous theory of moral values or principles, which underpins and supports a social system by providing guidelines for appropriate conduct within it. Yet it is also for a very concrete reason that such an outline is needed, namely to provide some background information for our investigation of quality assessment of language use. In the indigenous view, speaking is inextricably linked with the notion of interpersonal communication. Consequently, speech behaviour, particularly that in discursive speech contexts, is seen as constituting a special form of social behaviour. It is therefore not surprising that moral values should have some influence on quality assessment particularly in discursive speech modes such as political language or proverb speaking.

There are at least two ways to approach indigenous ethics: the first is to look at educational maxims, the second to explore the qualities of those who enjoy a high reputation, for they apparently behave in an exemplary manner and comply with the governing code of conduct. As far as educational maxims are concerned, the most comprehensive source is the *kundehun*, the bush school each adolescent has to attend before undergoing *kundi*, the final ceremony, which marks his entry into adulthood. During three to six weeks (in earlier days three to six months) the initiates are secluded in a bush camp, where they are instructed and prepared for their adult life by close relatives who stay with them in the camp and act as their tutors throughout.<sup>35</sup> Apart from physical and mental exercises, one of the most important constituents of the curriculum is the teaching of norms and rules which an adult is expected to observe and against

---

<sup>35</sup> While the boys are usually initiated at the age of 16-18, girls undergo *kundi* some years earlier, at the age of 12 -14. To them the ceremony is synonymous with their wedding. It is their future husband who introduces them to the *kundehun* and assists in the final stages of the initiation.

which the appropriateness of his conduct will be judged.<sup>36</sup> In the words of TY, the leader of the *kundi* of Kotari:

“On te forme, on t’enseigne la vie du milieu, quand tu te présentes au couvent.” (Int. 15/ 01/ 92).

This normative framework of “la vie du milieu” is transmitted in various ways. A popular means of instruction is the relation of *kundebi*, i.e. stories reserved for the *kundehun*, whose pedagogic value consists (at least partly) of exemplifying both good and bad behaviour and the consequences that will ensue if rules are violated:

TY: “C’est à travers les contes qu’on te dit: “La honte, voilà, il ne faut pas faire ceci. Si tu ne suis pas nos conseils, voilà le résultat.” (15/01/92).

Another, more straightforward way of schooling is to teach brief dialogues in which the initiate has to confess past misdemeanours and promise to behave in a seemly and mature manner henceforth.<sup>37</sup> Apart from their mere instructive value, these dialogues have also a legal character in so far as they provide the wording for a ritual interrogation in which the initiate is sworn to uphold the governing order. He has to do so once in front of *kyengi*, a stone which embodies *kundi* and is greatly feared because of its magical power, and a second time, before the assembled village population when the initiates leave their bush camp and rejoin their families.

Amongst the norms and values which are taught in preparation for adult life, we find, firstly, a set of commandments which bans specific acts and, by that, warrants fundamental rights and provides some basic guidelines for life in a social community. The rules include “tu ne dois pas voler, ne pas mentir, ne pas chercher la femme d’autrui, tu ne dois pas commettre l’adultère.” (TY in Int.

---

<sup>36</sup> Compare also Ouanbini (1976/77). As noted above, Niende, Natemba, Gurmantche and Berba form an inter-ethnic network on the basis of the same initiation rites. For a detailed description of the ceremony amongst the Niende see Huber (1979).

<sup>37</sup> The following examples may illustrate this form of inquiry. Note that the initiate is obliged to confess his sins, even if he has not committed them.

15/01/92). They have a partly legal status and are commonly binding. Secondly, there is the more subtle but also more pervasive part of the educational work whose aim it is to convey a sense of respect and responsibility for the given order and impart behavioural norms which comply with the structure of society. One of the primary purposes of the *kundehun* is, for example, to foster the recognition of status differences in terms of age and gender – the main organisational principles of Berba social order. It is now revealing to see, what kind of behaviour is immediately associated with the observance of this order:

TY: “L’objectif du couvent, c’est connaître les différentes catégories d’âge. Tu ne peux pas t’amuser avec ceux qui te dépassent en âge. Ils vont s’énerver [...] Maintenant, tu connais ta place et celle des autres hommes aussi. Et tu ne vas pas mal parler aux gens.” (Int. 15/01/91).

To TY, the respect for a given order is most evidently manifest in correct speech behaviour. As he sets out, the principal aim of *kundi* is the formation of age groups which are the backbone of any gerontocratic order. To recognize this order means, first and foremost, to assume a speech behaviour which is adapted to one’s personal position within, i.e. addressing higher ranking people in a respectful and obedient manner, while treating people of a lower status from a more authoritative position. How important this aspect is becomes clear from the fact that it even has the status of a commandment, here taught in the form of a dialogue:

Elder: “Nous savons que les gens disent que tu as injurié les grands. Est-ce que c’est vrai?”

Initiate: “Oui.”

Elder: “Maintenant il ne faut plus lancer des injures aux hommes. Tu dois obéir aux hommes qui te dépassent en âge. Rejette la colère de ton enfance.” (TY Int. 15/01/92).

That these behavioural maxims not only hold for status differences in terms of age but also in terms of gender, shows in the following remark by YT, a 35 year old woman from Kotari:

“Ta maman peut t’apprendre: “Ne parle pas comme ça! Sinon tu auras des ennemis. Les mots d’impolitesse. Il faut parler respectueusement et les gens vont te respecter.” (Int. 12/05/95

In the indigenous view, then, language use is regarded as the most immediate expression of social conduct. This is not too surprising in a society which is still predominantly oral and where the main medium of interpersonal interaction is the spoken word. At this point, two things should be noted: firstly, the notion of appropriateness in speech behaviour is (ideally) a matter of form rather than of content. This holds at least for the rules governing verbal interaction between adults of the same sex. A young adult may well express his opinion towards an elder, yet he has to do so in a seemly manner by carefully choosing his words and avoiding anything that would evince disrespect.<sup>38</sup> More rigid are the prescriptions that define appropriateness in verbal conduct between members of the two groups which exhibit the greatest status difference – initiate/ non initiate and men/ women. Yet even here, no one is denied the access to speech as such. Secondly, the requirement of appropriate verbal conduct also applies to high ranking speakers. It is expected that they do not abuse their superior standing by insulting, ridiculing or commanding someone in a way which is far beyond reasonable, but instead treat them with respect and grant them free expression, assuming that they comply with the formal rules (“il faut parler respectueusement et les gens vont te respecter”).<sup>39</sup> In other words, they are required to ‘remain within and not exceed the limit’ (*a twalə/ a kasi lə, a pə*

---

<sup>38</sup> Unlike the question of right or wrong, the decision as to whether or not a particular comportment is appropriate is, more often than not, a matter of discretion.

<sup>39</sup> For all that, we must not forget that we are dealing here with a local *theory*, the *ideal* of how people should behave. As in any other society, these rules are not always observed. Moreover, there are other elements which work against the proclaimed ideal. Although, for example, no one is denied the right to speak, there are clear exclusionary mechanisms, such as the feeling of shame towards a superior or the lack of verbal skill and the fear of public ridicule, which prevents people from freely expressing their views.

*twel bəkə*) of what is rightful and appropriate.<sup>40</sup> The following incident may illustrate this idea: DD, a young adult of 21 years, had got into serious trouble after he had impregnated a 16 year old girl from another village. As a student in his last year of college and without any means to support a family, he decided not to marry the girl, the more so since it had only been an amorous adventure and he was in fact in love with someone else. Yet he also felt guilty and did not want to let the girl down. It was a difficult time, and DD struggled a lot to find a solution. One day, when on a visit in a neighbouring village, he was invited by a group of elders to join them for a beer. DD followed their invitation, but before he could even take the first sip, he was pounced on by KY, an elder, who, having vaguely heard of the affair, forced DD to divulge the details of his story and admit his moral failure. DD's reply was a saucy proverb, by which he rebuked the elder for his indecent request to reveal in public what was painful enough for him anyway. The elder dropped the issue. Having learned of this incident, I was interested to know why an elder had accepted a rebuke from a younger (albeit adult) person, a rebuke which moreover had been transmitted in a form, which is normally used to address a peer, but not an elder. As I was told, KY had 'exceeded the limits', violated the norms of appropriate conduct in several ways: firstly, he had made no effort to get a complete picture of the affair and comprehend DD's point of view before judging him, and secondly, had attacked him in a very sudden manner, using bold and straightforward language, completely ignoring the delicacy of the matter and the fact that he shamed DD in public. Thus, he had failed to respect DD's right to some basic respect and fair treatment (he was, after all, an adult) even though or just because he was his superior – someone who should normally behave in an exemplary manner. It was hence justified (although not very polite) for DD to equally exceed the norm and respond in an 'exaggerated' way, as one informant put it, in terms of both content (rebuke) and code (invented proverb: pretentious).

---

<sup>40</sup> Lit.: 'Do not exceed but remain within your terrain'. The idea is 'a farmer trying to cultivate more than what he can cope with.' (*bəkə* = one hectare).

Let us come back to the two statements (TY in Int. 15/01/91 and YT in Int. 12/05/95) mentioned above, for they are revealing in yet another regard. As the warning remarks “les gens vont s’énervier” and “tu auras des ennemis” readily show, people are well aware of the damaging effect of inappropriate speech. ‘To speak badly’ risks upsetting people and generating conflicts, since basic rules of verbal interaction have been violated. In view of the potential fragility of a Berba community, it is not surprising that a special emphasis in the teaching program should be on apt language use as a means of avoiding unnecessary conflicts. That this not only implies a compliance with governing speech rules, but also appropriate verbal conduct in general, becomes clear from the following warning, transmitted in the *kundehun*:

TY: “Si tu parles comme ça, la société va disparaître. Si tu dis autre chose, la société va se développer.” (Int. 15/01/92)

Whatever the circumstances, one should always endeavour to use controlled language. Otherwise, it is not only individual relations which are put at risk, but the social peace and continued existence of the entire community which may be at stake. This brings us to another maxim which has figured in the commandments listed above and concerns the notion of *yorayaru* (‘lie’) as a major source of conflict. Not telling the truth risks causing confusion, if not generating conflicts by conveying false information. Even more reprehensible than *yorayaru* is *kundekunde*, a concept which is also translated with ‘lie’, yet has a slightly different meaning. It denotes ‘to deliberately procure trouble and stir up animosities between villagers by plotting, gossiping, spreading false information and telling lies’. Apart from violating the maxim of uprightness and honesty, the worst aspect of this kind of behaviour is the fact that someone deliberately jeopardizes social peace by sowing trouble between other people. Again, it is the awareness of the potential fragility of social peace which renders this behaviour the most despicable of all. In the indigenous view, the destructive work of a *kundekundetyau* – someone practising *kundekunde* – demonstrates nothing but immaturity and complete irresponsibility. According to DD:



“Si un garçon fait *kundekunde*, il va gâter la maison. Un garçon ne ment pas. Il est responsable de ses actes.” (Int. 03/05/95).<sup>41</sup>

Before concluding the discussion of behavioural norms, one more aspect must be mentioned which plays a pivotal role in the emic conception of appropriateness in speech behaviour. I am referring here to the quality of *yamfumə*, a term which derives from *yaməm*, ‘gall or temper’, and which connotes ‘patience, coolness, self-control’. The significance of this quality has already been suggested in two of the educational maxims cited above, where inept language use has been attributed to the lack of self-control “il ne faut plus lancer des injures aux hommes. Rejette la *colère* de ton enfance.” and “tu sais te *maîtriser*...et tu ne vas pas mal parler aux gens.” (EI in Int. 12/04/95). The ideal then, is to achieve a state of coolness and even-temperedness in order to be able to comply with all the criteria of appropriate (speech) behaviour and use language to the benefit of the social community. A speaker disposing of *yamfumə*, a *yamfutyau*, will avoid any needless conflict by carefully choosing his words and trying to avoid any unfair or offensive note; the speech will be measured and in compliance with the guiding rules of social interaction. Moreover, he will be forbearing with those who, for their part, violate the norms, and hence avoid, once again, unnecessary conflict which could bear hard on the social peace of the village. Last but not least, he will be able patiently to listen to others, take his time to reflect on their propositions, and come up with a mindful response. These qualities, in turn, render him the most suitable person to act as a mediator between conflicting parties. A *yamfutyau* then, thanks to his predisposition, behaves in a morally most pertinent way by helping to maintain and restore social peace in a potentially fragile society.

In concluding these remarks on education in the *kundehun*, two points can be made: First, the guidelines for normative conduct correspond to the organisational principles of a segmentary society. The aim is to provide an orientation for interactional behaviour, which ensures social peace and the

---

<sup>41</sup> It is telling that the *byali* translation of the French *politicien* is *kundekundetyau* - one more proof for the mistrust and disregard which Berba evince for state officials.

continued existence of the political order or community (provided it is generally adhered to). Secondly, considerable attention is paid to the control of language use – an understandable concern given the pivotal role of spoken language in social interaction.

Let us now turn to the second aspect of our discussion of indigenous ethics and examine the notion of prestige. The interest here is in the qualities which earn the members of a local community a high reputation. I will begin with four comments by a group of men and women aged between 34 and 64, who discuss the question: “Who is an important figure in a village? Who enjoys a high reputation and why?” As we will see, the question of reputation is inextricably linked with the aspect of thinking and acting for the well-being of the entire community. This echoes earlier observations concerning the notion of authority and leadership.

#### 5.1. Generosity and modesty

TK: “(Quelqu’un d’important c’est) celui qui est un peu riche et gentil et accueille beaucoup de gens. Et quelqu’un qui ne fait pas de bruit, qui ne se glorifie pas.” (Int. 12/05/95)

In TK’s view, the most important values are generosity and modesty. A villager should not accumulate his wealth and enviously guard it for himself, but, on the contrary, let others have a share in it (“gentil et accueille beaucoup de gens”). Moreover, he should never boast of his fortune or any other privilege or talent, but act in a modest and moderate manner (“ne se glorifie pas”), seeing himself as a *primus inter pares*, not a superior. Only then will he (ideally) obtain the full approval of the village community and enjoy considerable authority.

#### 5.2. Openness and sociability

YT: “(Quelqu’un d’important c’est) celui qui est ouvert et aime discuter des problèmes avec tout le monde.” (Int. 12/05/95)

Bearing in mind the call for early and thorough conflict resolution, before supernatural powers are involved, as well as the fear of *kundekunde* (the ill machinations behind the back of others) we understand that the qualities of frankness and openness should be highly valued. To communicate one's ideas and to strive to solve a problem demonstrates concern for others and an interest in the well-being of the social community. This aspect also resonates in the following comment, where a 54 year old woman describes whom she would consider best:

DK: “(Quelqu’un d’important c’est) celui, qui aime l’animation. Si, au marché, tout le monde est inquiet, si quelqu’une commence par entamer des chansons, tout le monde sera en joie.” (Int. 12/05/95)

### 5.3. Mediating qualities

BK: “(Quelqu’un d’important c’est) celui qui sait séparer les gens quand il y a les bagarres, qui intervient et dit: “Ne faites pas ça!” Il conseille les enfants. Et si la femme se dispute avec son mari, il va intervenir: “Ne faites pas cela! C’est mauvais pour le village!” C’est un type important.” (Int. 12/05/95)

According to BK, it is the one who is able to mediate between quarrelling parties, settle conflicts and restore peace in the village, who merits the highest respect. This echoes what has been suggested at earlier stages in the discussion and substantiates the notion of conflict management as one of the primary concerns of local ethics. Like any other people, the Berba prefer to live in peace, not in hostility. Apart from contributing to the quality of life – particularly in small-scale communities where frequent encounters are almost inevitable – it is also vital to the welfare of the community itself, since it generates an atmosphere of mutual comprehension and friendly support, which, in turn, is the *sine qua non* for any form of co-operation, whether it be defence against foreign aggressors as in earlier times, or, nowadays, the conception and realisation of communal projects on the village level.

Given what has been said so far about the local value system, it is only consistent that those who enjoy the highest reputation in Berba society are the *yamfutyau* (wise person) and *hirəkyau/ pəkyau* (great man/ woman), who act as mediators and counsellors in local affairs.<sup>42</sup> GD explains (in reference to a *hirəkyau*):

“Un sage n’est pas quelqu’un qui s’impose de force aux gens pour les convaincre. Il ne veut même pas parler pour se glorifier. Il attribue la parole à tout le monde avec gentillesse et il montre qu’il est leur serviteur, et tout le monde l’écoute avec respect. Et il essaie de résoudre leur problème.” (Int. 27/04/95).

Thanks to his balanced character as well as his legal expertise, a *hirəkyau* is able to fulfil one of the most important tasks in Berba society which is to restore social peace. What is most important, however, is the fact that he does not consider himself superior (“ne se glorifie pas”) but instead demonstrates that he acts on behalf of others and for the welfare of the entire community. It is therefore his exemplary behaviour which, according to the segmentary ethos, earns him the highest esteem and bestows on him with greatest authority (“tout le monde l’écoute avec du respect”).

---

<sup>42</sup> While *yamfutyau* means ‘wise person’ in general, not all *yamfutibə* have the same rights and act in the same domain. Social stratification also operates in this regard, and it is age and gender which decide on the main area of activity. Any *yamfutyau* may mediate between his peers and those who are younger than himself. The highest prestige and greatest authority is with the *hirəkyau* great men, who are not only *yamfumə* but also dispose of a profound cultural knowledge and a lifelong experience in legal matters. A *pəkyau*, in turn, will only intervene in women’s affairs. Yet, as people never tire of underlining, it is the quality of advice which counts, so that also a young person or a woman would be listened to in ‘grand’ cases, provided they provided the solution to a problem.

### Chapter III: Language use in political settings

As has been noted earlier, Berba politics centre around two main principles, conflict management and consensus formation. Their institutional equivalents are litigation or reconciliation sessions and political debates. In the present chapter I will focus on the latter and investigate the emic conception of skill and quality as regards language use in political debates, i.e. speech events where issues of communal interest are put to discussion and debated in public. A case study in a later part of this work will illustrate the findings (see chapter 6).

#### 1. Background

The conception of village politics has changed considerably over the past thirty years. This can be attributed mainly to two factors: a shifting sense of local identity, and transformations in the social and political environment which confront people with new problems, but also open up new perspectives. As a result of interventions by the state administration and other developments, the structure of a village, and with it, the way people see themselves, has changed. Side by side with traditional identification patterns which operate along kin bonds, we can note a growing sense of attachment to a local community. Moreover, the pacification of the region, allowing for greater mobility and more intense trading activity (emerging markets and an improved infrastructure), as well as the increasing engagement of aid organisations have engendered new fields of activity on a local and regional level. As a result, village politics are increasingly viewed in terms of co-operation and communal action – a notable development compared to earlier years, when politics mainly consisted of the organisation of a forceful defence against outside aggressors.<sup>1</sup> The shift in

---

<sup>1</sup> The almost entire lack of professional stratification and an economy based on subsistence farming rendered the individual households autonomous and independent from each other. Hence, even if a *syeli* was composed of different descent groups, the occasions to meet and discuss issues of common concern were not numerous. Communal activities centred around the organisation of hunting expeditions or co-operation in fieldwork, whilst communal decisions mainly concerned defence strategies against external aggressors. One of the few occasions which are recalled as major 'political events' were *hulamə*, lavish ceremonies where members of different clans

perspective is reflected in a growing number of committees and associations whose aim is to improve the living conditions in a village. Initially launched by the state administration or development agencies, it is nowadays the villagers themselves who initiate and organize such associations. Varying in size and concern, they range from small, specialized committees preoccupied with the maintenance of the local facilities to large groups such as the *Association de développement villageois (ADV)*, which comprise the entire community and treat issues of general interest (e.g. a road construction or the restoration of the market place).<sup>2</sup> An important aspect of their activity is holding meetings where current issues are debated, new projects developed and future operations organized. It is these gatherings I will concentrate on in the investigation, for it is here that much of the local politics takes place. Moreover, due to the particularities of the speech situation they provide an ideal occasion to explore notions of quality and skill in language use: a speaker who finds himself the focus of attention is under much more pressure to excel than a speaker who is engaged in an informal talk exchange.<sup>3</sup> Let us begin with a brief description of the circumstances in which public gatherings take place. It facilitates the

---

and lineages gathered to commemorate a deceased person and to sort out his debts in land, property and women.

<sup>2</sup> In Kotari, for example, there are ten associations, set up between 1979 and 1994. They include an *Association des parent d'élèves* (1979), a *Banque de Vivre* (1986), a *Comité point de l'eau* as part of the *Projet Hydrique Villageois* (1989), three *Groupements des femmes* (1986 (maintenance of mill), 1990 (savings bank) and 1994 (mothers' care), a *Comité de Crédit* (1993), and an *Association Villagoise de Développement* (1993). The efficiency and commitment of the associations differ on the village as well as on the regional level. Kotari, where most of the research was conducted, is a relatively intact community, where a considerable number of inhabitants are actively engaged in the improvement of the living conditions in the village. Other *syeli*, on the contrary, display a poorer performance, which can partly be attributed to a weaker sense of identity with the local community. Another point concerns the composition of the associations. Like many other societies, the percentage of those who are truly engaged on a level that reaches beyond their private sphere is fairly small. The result is a considerable overlap of the members in the various associations.

<sup>3</sup> To concentrate on public debates is not to ignore the impact of private politics, the influence that informal encounters between neighbours and friends have on the communal decision-making process. Yet, although the significance of this sphere must not be underestimated (and is readily admitted by the Berba themselves), it is still the formal political debates which constitute the main forum where local affairs are dealt with. By that it differs from other debating cultures, as for example the Balinese, where public assemblies serve to validate and affirm what has been decided beforehand by 'a system of majority assessment outside the assembly' (Hobart 1975: 92).

comprehension of the emic conceptions of the nature and purpose of a debate and explains the expectations concerning the speaker's skills.

To hold a meeting, a schedule and date have to be arranged with the representative of the committee and/ or the village head (if he is not the convenor himself) before it is officially announced by the village crier.<sup>4</sup> At the respective date, anyone who is concerned by or interested in the issue makes his way to the meeting place.<sup>5</sup> Only a few *syeli* dispose of special localities, yet there are standard sites which are regularly used for larger gatherings owing to their central situation (e.g. market place) or adequate seating accommodation (e.g. roots of big trees, sheltered market stands). There is no seating order. People make themselves comfortable wherever they like. No one, not even a respected elder or the head of the committee, takes a special position. Consequently, the appearance of an assembled group greatly varies. Full or half circle, dense cluster or loose grouping – any formation is possible as long as the participants remain within earshot. The debate is formally opened by the representative of the group, who welcomes the disputants and expresses his thanks for their attendance. He then hands over the moderation to the initiator of the debate, who introduces the order of the day and briefly comments on the topics before opening the floor to the participants.<sup>6</sup> A sequence of lengthy

---

<sup>4</sup> Work constraints are influential in fixing a suitable date for an assembly. Not only are public debates preferably held in the evening, but the Berba also tend to meet in the dry season, when the workload is lowest, and the farmers dispose of the greatest financial reserves after having sold their harvest. This plays an important role in the planning and realisation of costly projects.

<sup>5</sup> Attendance varies, depending on the interest in the subject matter and the confidence in the effectiveness of an association. Another point regards the active participation of women. Apart from their engagement in associations especially designed for their concerns, women still figure little in political debates, a phenomenon which can be ascribed partly to their greater work load (household chores and fieldwork), and partly to the still male dominated ideology which assigns women a subordinate status in public affairs.

<sup>6</sup> One question which cannot be satisfactorily answered concerns the origin of these procedural conventions. Although the Berba emphasize that they date from time immemorial, it is also conceivable that some elements, such as the listing of the topics of the day, are recent innovations, adopted from foreign sources (meetings organized on the administrative level or by development agencies). Overall, however, I think it is futile to speculate about the age and authenticity of procedural aspects. In my opinion, the Berba have willingly adopted these elements, for they suit their conception of the aim and objective of a debate.

statements on the main subject constitutes the beginning, followed by a discussion of individual aspects of the problem. The event is closed in a rather informal way. When a consensus has been reached, the chairman or another participant will sum it up and suggest further steps towards its implementation. People may also simply leave or the assembly may dissolve into small debating groups. If, on the contrary, the emergence of irreconcilable differences or the lack of a piece of information does not allow the debate to come to an acceptable conclusion, it will be postponed to a later date. Whatever the outcome, a meeting rarely exceeds more than two or three hours.<sup>7</sup>

## **2. Observations during a debate**

### **2.1. Interactional behaviour**

One of the most remarkable features is the discipline with which a public debate is conducted.<sup>8</sup> Moments of complete disorder are unusual, and if they occur, they are quickly settled by the chairman or another disputant. Turn-taking, one of the main sources of confusion, happens in a notably smooth way, and there is little disorder created by the audience. The one who wishes to speak simply takes over after his predecessor has ended. More often than not, he will precede his discourse with a brief “*Tó!*”, an exclamation which serves to mark a caesura and establish the right to the floor. Also, an orator is only rarely interrupted, criticized, applauded or commented upon while giving his speech.<sup>9</sup> Clutter, if at all, is most likely to occur at the end of a debate when it becomes obvious that no conclusion can be reached, and the participants split up to dispute in smaller groups. What accounts for this discipline? There is, first of all, the ordering function of the representative of a group or the initiator of a debate:

---

<sup>7</sup> None of the debates I participated in exceeded three hours. Participants often show signs of unrest after two and a half hours when it becomes obvious that no conclusion will be reached. The debate is then postponed rather than prolonged.

<sup>8</sup> The basis of investigation is fourteen assemblies which I had the opportunity to witness and record during 1995 and 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Of all the speech events, only two featured moments of disorder. In the first case, a provocative statement had sparked a heated debate amongst five participants, who only gradually cooled down. In the second instance, the meeting ended in considerable turmoil, when it emerged that there was no prospect of reconciling the opposing parties and attacks became increasingly personal. Having fiercely argued for a while, the disputants finally got tired of the event and decided to postpone the debate.



YK: "Après la (présentation de l'ordre du jour), c'est lui, le président de la séance qui accorde la parole aux gens: "Tu as la parole!" Après avoir fini, si tu veux continuer sans avoir le droit, il peut t'interrompre et dire: "Ah, tu n'as pas le droit de parler! J'avais accordé la parole à celui-ci!" (Int. 04/06/95)

NK: "Dans les discussions pareilles, vous avez un dirigeant, et les opinions ne sont pas les mêmes, vous lui accordez la parole pour échanger des opinions. C'est à lui de décider, parce que vous l'avez élu, vous l'avez considéré avant. Il y a des moments où on ne peut pas carrément refuser son supérieur. Il y a des moments où on est obligé d'accepter, parce qu'il partage des idées en disant: "Ce que celui-ci dit, c'est vrai. Maintenant, ce que l'autre dit, c'est aussi vrai. Donc, aujourd'hui nous prenons ceci, demain cela. Et vous allez écouter et accepter." (Int. 04/06/95)

As becomes readily apparent, it is the head of an association ("président de la séance", "dirigeant") who is expected to act as a chairman and see to an ordered proceeding by censuring unseemly speech behaviour ("continuer sans avoir le droit") and reconciling divergent views ("il partage des idées"). His stand is that of a *primus inter pares* whose authority has been established at the time of his designation ("c'est à lui de décider, parce que vous l'avez élu") and who will be respected as long as he fulfils the duties attached to his office. Despite this ordering force, though, it is remarkable how few interventions are actually necessary. This suggests the existence of another regulating mechanism. And indeed, as we shall see later on, the Berba recognize a specific code of conduct which governs interactional behaviour in a political debate.

## 2.2. Expressive behaviour

The second observation regards the style of delivery. Compared to other oratorical traditions, Berba expressive behaviour appears conspicuously restrained (Albert 1972; Firth 1975: 38; Finnegan 1970: 454-55; Strathern 1975: 188; Turton 1975: 171; Yankah 1995). Apart from a few standard gestures, which display an almost semantic quality, the use of paralinguistic or

histrionic devices is confined to a minimum.<sup>10</sup> Little effort is made to catch the audience's attention or illustrate one's words by establishing eye-contact, gesticulating or moving around. Instead, orators usually remain calmly seated, look down or fix a far-away point while issuing their speech (this is particularly true for those instances when the speaker is about to launch an attack against another participant). Their quiet conduct, together with the careful framing and 'compact' nature of many statements, conveys the impression of the 'delivery of a text' rather than the 'performance of a speech'. Their conduct is paralleled by the equally reserved behaviour of the audience. Spontaneous exclamations or sudden interjections are rare, as are other forms of immediate response (nodding, hand-clapping). To the outside observer it is often not easy to guess what impression the speech has made on the audience.

Summing up, two points can be made: firstly, a political debate is a speech event in which villagers come together in order to discuss issues of local concern. They are hence joined by a common interest, not by parental bonds. This is important in so far as it means that their relation to each other is determined by egalitarian principles, i.e. principles that govern a segmentary system.<sup>11</sup> The relevance of this fact will become obvious when we examine the notion of appropriateness in speech behaviour. Secondly, a debate is distinguished by two features, namely orderliness and text-centredness. As will emerge from the following investigation, both properties are directly related to the nature and purpose of such a speech event, whose underlying precepts reflect these features in a most conspicuous way.

---

<sup>10</sup> Typical gestures are putting a closed fist before the mouth to express astonishment, clapping the back of one hand against the palm of the other when emphasizing sad or unbelievable facts, or passing one hand over the other to signal the end of a speech.

<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, in a small-scale society such as the Berba, the familial and the local, as well as the social and the political cannot easily be separated from each other. Family members may find themselves together in the same work group, as may members of different age groups. Yet, as we will see, behavioural rules which inform these relations are restricted to the observance of a certain etiquette, while the speech situation itself is governed by the egalitarian ethos. It is this latter point which renders an investigation of speech behaviour in a political debate particularly interesting. Going beyond an analysis of political language use, it conveys a sense of verbal interaction between members of different segments in general.

We shall now turn to the main part of this chapter which examines local conceptions of quality and skill in political language use.

### **3. Quality assessment of political language**

The basis of the investigation are twelve interviews, conducted between 1995 and 1996, in which local critics evaluate and comment on selected aspects of speech behaviour in political debates. The analysis builds on three premises:

- a) The perception of quality, and with it the canon of evaluative criteria against which the quality of language use is measured, is essentially determined by the emic conception of the nature and purpose of the speech event .
- b) It is the audience who critically judge the speech behaviour and apply the canon of evaluative criteria.
- c) A speaker who intends to attain rhetorical success will endeavour to meet these criteria and adjust his rhetoric to the audience's expectations.<sup>12</sup>

We will begin with the first point and explore the emic conception of a political debate.

#### **3.1. The emic conception of a political debate**

ST: "Une réunion, c'est pour échanger des idées. On convoque une réunion à cause des travaux, des concessions et tu dois y participer. Si tu arrives là-bas, il y aura certains vieux qui parlent mal. Si tu présentes une opinion claire, tu peux les aider à résoudre un problème. Toi aussi, si tu as mal parlé, les vieux peuvent te corriger."

AC: "Et les femmes, ont-elles le même droit de s'exprimer franchement?"

ST: "Les femmes peuvent parler parce qu'on accorde la parole à tout le monde. Et si les vieux finissent, la femme et le jeune

---

<sup>12</sup> Compare Bailey's remark: "An audience in certain circumstances is a kind of authority and its expectations about what it should hear will determine which mode of rhetoric will be effective" (1981: 33). This is particularly true for speech situations in which the audience is an equal partner and takes a critical stance towards the speaker's discourse.

peuvent parler. C'est après qu'on peut tirer des bonnes idées dedans." (Int. 02/02/96)

In his answer, the critic is very clear about the nature and purpose of a public debate. As he explains, there is always a specific reason, a concrete cause to hold a meeting ("on convoque une réunion à cause"). The issues relate to the group's activity and are practical rather than philosophical in nature. It is the intention to settle current problems ("résoudre un problème"), whether this means a critical revision of past initiatives, an examination of the present situation or the development of future strategies. The way to accomplish this goal is by exchanging 'ideas' ("échanger des idées"). Only after having collected a maximal amount of information and considered the problem from various perspectives can the most efficient conclusions can be drawn and commonly acceptable decisions be made ("après on peut tirer des bonnes idées dedans"). To make this ideal work and obtain a maximal exchange of ideas it is highly recommended that each participant, regardless of rank and status, should be accorded the same right to speak ("on accorde la parole à tout le monde").<sup>13</sup> If a participant is not satisfied with a decision, he may express his discontent and start the discussion anew. Once a consensus has been reached, however, each disputant is equally responsible for the decision, which in turn is expected to

---

<sup>13</sup> The notion of equality, so boldly proclaimed by the male elderly critic, requires some modification, for social hierarchy still affects the kind of participation in a debate. Although the egalitarian principle holds for interpersonal relations on the cross-segmentary level, there are still differences in rank and prestige which stem from the traditional system of social stratification and operate along the lines of age and gender. In our context this means that male elders are most likely to speak first, while women or adolescents are assigned a later part in the discussion. Given the general objection to any form of redundancy, this rule is likely to entail a 'natural exclusion' of the latter, since the chance to come up with an original statement after many facets of the problem have already been dealt with is considerably lowered. Social change, however, calling for new forms of expertise and procuring new classes of speakers (e.g. literate young people), is beginning to challenge this mechanism (compare Firth 1975: 36-37). Another interesting aspect is indicated by a male critic who comments on women's speaking abilities: "Ici, beaucoup de femmes ne savent pas parler...S'il y a beaucoup de gens, on lui demande si elle 'connaît', elle dit qu'elle ne sait rien. C'est la honte. Or, elle connaît. En rentrant, elle va chanter ça." (Int. 04/06/95). Women, while shying away from 'public' speech due to their inferior social status, have other means to air their view. The most efficient one is the composition of songs – a female dominated domain – in which social and political issues are dealt with and which are publicized at any larger social event.

have a positive impact on its realisation. If a political debate is perceived as a 'co-operative effort to resolve a communal problem by a maximal exchange of ideas', what follows for the speech behaviour expected of an orator?

To answer this question, we have to distinguish between two analytical units, namely the speech event and the speech act. While the first refers to the overall framework, i.e. the conditions in which debating takes place, the latter pertains to the individual discourse issued in the course of the event. Both levels must be considered in an investigation of 'quality' and skill in language use, for they both precondition, in one way or another, the successful outcome of a speech event and can hence be expected to find expression in the canon of speech conventions a skilled orator ought to comply with and the evaluative criteria he should meet. I shall begin with the first aspect and delineate the rules that underpin interactional behaviour on the level of the speech event.

### 3.2. Conventions concerning speech behaviour in a group

AC: "J'ai suivi quelques réunions ici, et il me semble qu'il y a quelques règles pour parler, par exemple quelqu'un termine (son discours) et dit: "J'ai assez parlé. La parole est à l'autre maintenant."

PR: "Pourquoi on dit ça? Tu prends la parole et tu t'arrêtes à un certain point, parce que tu sais que tu n'es pas le seul. Ce que tu dis – certains le connaissent. Des fois, ils peuvent même parler plus clair que toi. L'orateur doit s'arrêter et les écouter aussi."  
(Int. 04/06/95)

One of the most important conventions concerns the scope of an individual contribution. As "tu prends la parole et tu t'arrêtes à un certain point" indicates, no speaker has the right to monopolize the platform. Instead he is expected to conclude his discourse after an appropriate time and leave the floor to others. In his comment, PR expounds why people (willingly) adhere to this rule: first, it is considered a sign of respect for others and an expression of recognition of the communal effort to resolve a particular problem ("tu n'es pas le seul"). Secondly, it may be an advantage to hand the floor over to another speaker who not only shares the same view, but is much better able to impress it on the

audience (“des fois ils peuvent même parler plus clair que toi”). To the assembled group, in turn, it is vital to comply with this rule if the aim is to maximize the exchange of ideas. It conveys the impression that the problem has been treated in the most comprehensive way, and that whatever the decision, it has been made to the best knowledge and belief of all participants. As we will see later on, this convention involves a number of discursive practices, amongst them the deployment of linguistic markers to indicate the end of a speech and authorise others to take their turn. Indirectly, the rule also affords some protection against undue interruption, since anyone who intends to speak knows that he has to await the respective sign before he can take the floor.

This brings us to the second convention, which concerns the conduct of the audience. As much as it is expected of a speaker to keep to a certain time frame, it is also required of listeners to respect the time allotted to the speaker and listen to him or at least not disturb his delivery (“tu dois les écouter aussi”). Once more, the rationale for adhering to this rule rests with the maximisation of the verbal exchange and the improvement of the efficacy of the speech event. Interruptions are acceptable only if they serve to restore order or sanction a speaker who has contravened other speech conventions, such as concluding on time or ignoring special agreements:

PR: “Interrompre quelqu’un – ça arrive si quelqu’un ne veut pas cesser parce que tu n’es pas seul.” (Int. 04/06/95)

KO: “On peut aussi t’interrompre, si tu parles hors de l’affaire. Et aussi, s’il y a un étranger et vous ne voulez pas que quelqu’un dise quelque chose devant lui.” (Int. 04/06/95)

It is these interactional maxims, which, apart from the regulative function of a chairperson, account for the orderliness so typical of a political debate (see above). The rationale for observing these rules is twofold: on the one hand, it is reasonable to behave in a way which contributes to the overall objective of the speech event.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand there is what can be termed the ‘categorical

---

<sup>14</sup> A similar argument is put forth by Grice with regard to conversational maxims, when he notes that “anyone who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication [...] must be expected to have an interest, given suitable circumstances, in participation in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that

imperative of discursive interaction' in an egalitarian speech situation: if I expect others to treat me in a certain way, I have to give them the same respect. While the observance of the principal rules of interaction undoubtedly influences the judgement of speech behaviour, it is nonetheless the nature of the individual discourse that is at the heart of quality assessment. It is this aspect which is also most intimately related to our interest in rhetorical skill.

### 3.3. Quality assessment on the speech act level

TG: "Si quelqu'un dit des choses qui ne peuvent jamais construire une maison, les choses qui la détruisent (*bə wəgi təpu*), on ne doit pas l'écouter. Ce sont les choses réelles (*magerə*) et riches (*subi*) qui sont importantes dans un langage."  
(Int. 04/06/95)

In his comprehensive answer, TG lists a whole range of criteria, against which the quality of political language is assessed. Right at the beginning, he mentions what can be regarded as the leitmotif of quality assessment: the criterion of 'constructiveness' (*təpu kylem*). 'To construct a house', as we will remember from the discussion on moral values, denotes 'to provide the grounds on which a social community can prosper' or, more generally, 'to have a positive impact on something'. Applied to our context, constructiveness easily translates into 'speaking in a way which fosters the course of debate and averts anything which could stand in its way' ("ne pas parler des choses qui ne peuvent jamais construire une maison").<sup>15</sup> Two dimensions of constructiveness, and stemming from them two dimensions of verbal competence can be distinguished. First, if a speaker wishes to contribute to the solution of a problem, he has to be capable of making a valuable proposition and, most importantly, communicate his ideas

---

they are conducted in general accordance with the C[operative] P[rinciple] and the maxims." (1975: 49). In this context, it is interesting to note that many of the maxims established by Grice also figure in the Berba meta-discourse (make your contribution as informative, true, relevant, perspicuous as is required).

<sup>15</sup> The notion of 'constructiveness' as an asset in communicative action recalls the moral values listed in the preceding chapter. This coincidence is neither surprising nor incidental. We have to bear in mind that the participants are united by a common interest, not parental bonds. The behavioural conventions which apply are hence those which govern inter-segmental relations in an uncentralized society.

to others. What he therefore needs is linguistic competence. Only then will he be able to advance the exchange of ideas and help to draw up a commonly acceptable decision. The level of analysis is the individual speech act, and the evaluative criteria are textual criteria. Secondly, there is the requirement of social competence. Apart from communicating information and ideas, a speaker is expected to avoid anything which would jeopardize the debate itself and endanger the only forum where verbal interaction takes place. 'Constructiveness' in this regard pertains to the level of the speech event and connotes the speaker's skill in preserving or restoring an atmosphere of peaceful co-operation. The point of reference in the evaluative process is the cultural code of conduct (compare chapter 2).

### 3.3.1. Linguistic competence and textual criteria

The canon of textual criteria, listed in the quote above, splits into two different analytical categories: referential and structural.

#### 3.3.1.1. Level of content (referential value): substantiveness and truth

Apart from its literal meaning 'rich' or 'heavy' the term *subi* is commonly used to denote things which are considered 'substantive' and 'thoughtprovoking'. To speak *subi* means to make an interesting and relevant point, worthy of reflection and consideration. It is constructive in several regards: by providing relevant pieces of information and opening up new perspectives, the speaker contributes to a fruitful debate and advances the decision-making process.

The second parameter is *magari* or truth. Preoccupied by practical rather than philosophical issues, the indigenous conception of truth comes close to the classic-ontological 'correspondence between fact and proposition', building on the assumption of an 'objective' reality.<sup>16</sup> The requirement of truth in a political

---

<sup>16</sup> We ought not to forget that we are dealing with an emic conception that does not necessarily correspond to the theoretical framework of Western epistemology. While in the indigenous view, truth is perceived as an absolute quality, and sources of evidence are considered adequate, epistemologists would argue that, due to the lack of adequate evidence it is only possible to claim a 'probable knowledge', a 'certain knowledge' which is not knowledge of absolute truth' (Aaron, 1985: 605).



discourse becomes comprehensible when we call to mind that the decisions which are made have to prove their worth in future realities. Hence, the more facts, the more hard data available, the greater the chance to arrive at a sound and sustainable solution.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.3.1.2. Structural level: clarity

Apart from criteria relating to the referential level, there is another important property which decides the quality of a discourse:

TS: "Si (quelqu'un) parle clairement (*tinge*), on doit l'écouter.  
Mais si sa parole est un peu tordue, on ne l'écouterà pas." (Int.  
04/06/95)

The requirement of clarity is a direct consequence of the request to 'communicate ideas'. However true or substantive a proposition may be, it is of little value if it is presented in a distorted and confusing manner, rendering it difficult for the audience to grasp the speaker's point of view.

Having identified the primary yardsticks against which the linguistic quality of a speech is measured, the question arises as to what kind of strategies are suitable to meet these criteria. To answer this question, we have to take into account the dynamics of the situation in which speaking takes place. Unlike, say, a storytelling session, where the course and content of the event are clearly defined and agreed upon by both parties in the communicative process, a political debate is characterized by a much greater complexity, not only as regards the subject matter itself, but also in terms of divergent attitudes towards the speech event. While the audience expects a contribution which helps to resolve a problem, a speaker may wish to decide the final outcome to his advantage and push personal interests. In this case, his intention will be to influence, if not alter the listeners' mind. The following analysis examines in

---

<sup>17</sup> There are striking similarities with the critical discourse reported from the Haya of Tanzania. According to Seitel, one of the parameters by which the quality of a speech is assessed is 'substantiveness' meaning the "relative ability to necessitate some sort of social action" (1972: 92).

what form the speaker has to cast his propositions to satisfy both needs and reconcile his own ambitions with the audience's expectations.

### 3.3.2. The nature of rhetoric in Berba political language

TN: "Des fois on accepte (un propos), parce qu'on n'arrive pas à discuter avec lui (le porte-parole). Il dit cela, tu le renverses, il réplique [...] tu seras obligé d'accepter parce que tu n'arrives pas à répondre. Mais tu sais que tu as raison et tu vas te taire. Tout le monde croisera les bras et regarde s'il peut le faire seul... On dit: "Ah, ah, ah.", on part et on ne fera rien." [laughter] (Int. 04/06/95)

The description by TN of success and failure in verbal interaction is telling: a speaker has, at least at first sight, attained his goal. Owing to his rhetorical skills, he has been able to deprive his opposition of his main weapon, the word, and turned him 'speechless' ("tu n'arrives pas à répondre"). This kind of achievement is termed *bə sorə* or *bə di toyeni*, meaning: to 'eat' (another one's) word. Yet, TN goes on to explain, to have silenced an audience does not necessarily attest complete success. What the speaker, despite his eloquence, has been unable to achieve is to get the audience to adopt his view ("mais tu sais que tu as raison") and act on his behalf ("on part et on ne fera rien"). To comprehend his failing, we have to call to mind that we are dealing with an egalitarian speech situation, where (ideally) no one can impose his will on others. Hence, it is up to the audience to decide whether or not they will accept a proposition and change their mind.<sup>18</sup> Even if the speaker should talk them down, they still have a most powerful weapon left, namely the denial of a positive response, the refusal of attention, support and co-operation. Without support the best proposition is worth little, since it will hardly ever be realized. For the orator, the ultimate goal, then, consists not in the silencing of his audience, but in the inducement of action. What then is the ideal of rhetoric in political language?

---

<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, 'free will' and 'equality' are ideal categories. In reality differences in social and economic power may well restrain the liberty of decision.

Paine, in his investigation of political language, discerns two forms of verbal influence with regard to the disposition to act, namely conviction and persuasion. "Whereas it is reasonable to suppose that a 'persuaded' person is [...] disposed to act, he who is simply convinced may still not allow himself to be persuaded: what he has accepted as 'true' he nevertheless does not deem as appropriate or compelling for his own behaviour." (1981c: 13)<sup>19</sup> The distinguishing factor is a 'necessary element of commitment' which a speaker has to draw from the audience in order to ensure their co-operation (ibid. p.10). Applied to our case, we can reasonably conclude that the most apposite mode of speaking in Berba political language is a rhetoric of persuasion.

This inference can further be qualified. Persuasion, according to Paine, is a process which (ideally) begins with the "suspension of disbelief among the members of the audience, then it moves to the inducement of their collaborative expectancy and finally it achieves their complicity with the speaker" (ibid. p.11). It is an essentially cognitive process which culminates in the alteration of the listener's belief. To the speaker this means that he has to present his opinion in a way which makes it easy for the listener to both accept it as true and incorporate it into his own thinking. One of the most appropriate means to achieve this goal is by persuasively *arguing* a case. Argumentation is defined as a "démarche par laquelle une personne – ou un groupe – entreprend d'amener un auditoire à adopter une position par le recours à des présentations en assertions – arguments – qui visent à en montrer la *validité* ou le *bien fondé*." (Oléron 1983: 4, emphasis by the author). An argument, then, confirms a point by proving its validity. The ideal mode of speaking, then, *expected from* and *deployed by* a proficient speaker is a rhetoric of 'persuasive argumentation.'<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> What appears as a fine nuance in the English language is more conspicuous in other languages. In Latin, for example, the difference between conviction and persuasion is expressed in grammatical terms: while the verb *persuadere*, followed by the consecutive *ut*, equals 'to induce action by hortatory language, without necessarily drawing on the audience's commitment', *persuadere* followed by an Acl, denotes an inducement of action which is based on a cognition and builds on the recipient's commitment. In German, the distinction is made apparent with the two verbs *überreden* and *überzeugen*.

<sup>20</sup> My understanding of the term rhetoric draws on the theory recently developed by scholars of the 'New Rhetoric', who, by linking up to the Aristotelian tradition, comprehend rhetoric as a "theory of argumentation that has as its object the study of discursive techniques and that aims to provoke or to increase the adherence of the

The worth of this kind of rhetoric becomes even more conspicuous when it is taken into account that the audience we are dealing with is critical and relatively sophisticated (an informed interest group) and will thus not be easily persuaded to abandon a preconceived view (compare Perelman and Sloan 1983: 803).<sup>21</sup>

Bearing in mind these results, we are now in the position to further specify the textual criteria listed in the beginning, to suggest how they will manifest themselves in a skilful speech and to delineate the linguistic techniques an orator has to deploy in order to attain a full rhetorical success.

As to *subi* (substantiveness): To meet the criterion of 'substantiveness' a speaker should try to think up sound arguments and avoid hollow phrases and hortatory language. Equally, he should abstain from needless repetition of points already made in earlier contributions. If he intends to support a certain view, he is advised to pick out specific aspects and develop them further, not merely reiterate them. A ready illustration of this mode of expression is provided in the last chapter.

As to *magari* (truth): As outlined above, people expect a political discourse to be true. To assess this property and confirm the correspondence between fact and proposition, they will search for adequate evidence, evidence which validates the point.<sup>22</sup> The most suitable means to meet these expectations

---

men's minds to the theses that are presented for their assent." Argumentation allows men "not only to verify and to prove their beliefs, but also to justify their decisions and their choices. (Perelman and Sloan 1983: 803). It is held that "in all these considerations...form is subordinate to content, to the action on the mind, to the effort to persuade and to convince. Consequently, the new rhetoric...is concerned with the effective use of informal reasoning in all fields." (ibid. p. 804-05) With its emphasis on cognition and the positive approach towards 'opinion', the definition differs from commonly held views, where rhetoric in the context of verbal interaction is seen in rather negative terms, being associated with manipulative intent (propaganda) and emotive appeal (hortatory language). This conceptual divide reflects a still ongoing debate about the value and significance of rhetoric, building on differing views on the epistemological status of 'opinion' as opposed to 'truth'.

<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, Burke argues that, in proportion to the degree of specialisation of the subject matter, the proof moves towards argumentative reasoning (1969: 51) Given that an ordinary Berba audience is united by their common interest in a certain issue, we can assume at least some degree of understanding and expertise, which in turn would explain the importance attached to the technique of argumentation.

<sup>22</sup> According to the Aristotelian theory, a premise on which an argument builds can only be probable (not demonstrable like the truth of a scientific proof). Respectively,

is by convincingly *arguing* a case. Yet, as the philosopher Aaron rightly remarks, "evidence is adequate only in a relative and not in an absolute sense" (1985: 605). However sound and substantial a proposition, it ultimately depends on the recipient whether he deems evidence adequate and the argument valuable. This has important implications for the choice of verbal strategies. In his classic work "On Rhetoric" Aristotle introduces the notion of '*topos*' (pl. *topoi*), meaning: a mental 'place' where an argument can be found or the argument itself (1.2.21). Its value derives from the ability to provide the most adequate evidence. Particularly effective are those *topoi* which bear a close relation to the world view and background experience of the person who is to be persuaded. Not only may he easily estimate the truth of the point, which is carried forward, but he is prone to open himself up to the reasoning by *wholeheartedly* affirming the validity of the proposition.<sup>23</sup> (As future examples will show, metaphorical proverbs and parables play an important role in this regard). Evidence can be drawn from various sources, including sense perception (i.e. the actual seeing, touching, and hearing), the memory of such experiences, a consciousness of the observer's own feelings and hearsay knowledge, a source of evidence which is particularly relevant in an oral culture. In terms of verbal strategies, the latter advocates the use of testimonials or shifters of listening, as Barthes calls them, designating "all mention of sources, of testimony, all reference to a listening of the historian, collecting an *elsewhere* of his discourse and speaking it." (1978: 128, also cited in Basso 1990: 6). And another factor deserves to be mentioned, which does not figure in Western epistemology, but, as Parkin rightly remarks, is of considerable importance in the African context. It is the notion of 'partiality': something is perceived as true if anyone else believes it true.<sup>24</sup> One technique to exploit this source is the use of the first person plural pronoun 'we', suggesting mutual consent on a

---

an argument can only be strong or weak, but never true (Kopperschmidt 1973: 133). The Berba, although well aware of the relative value of evidence, do not make such a distinction. They judge true whatever they can approve.

<sup>23</sup> Compare Perelman and Sloan who note: "The orator, in order to succeed in his undertaking, must start from theses accepted by his audience and eventually reinforce this adherence by techniques of presentation that render the facts and values on which his argument rests present to the listener." (1983: 803).

<sup>24</sup> This conception equals the Roman principle of *consensus gentium*.

certain fact. Since the judgement of the adequacy of a piece of evidence is highly subjective, we can reasonably assume that factors such as the credibility and reputation of the speaker should also play a part in it. Nonetheless, the ultimate measure is still the 'objective' and 'perceptible' reality, as the following statement clearly shows:

AC: "Est-ce qu'on suit des enfants qui donnent des conseils ou des réponses convaincantes?"

SY: "Oui, on les écoute. L'enfant propose quelque chose qu'on ne croit pas tout de suite mais, à la longue, on se rend compte que c'est une réalité." (Int. 04/06/95)

In the social hierarchy a child takes the lowest rank and enjoys the least esteem. Consequently, he is accorded the smallest amount of credibility. Although being heard ("on les écoute"), people do not easily believe his words or take his proposals seriously ("on ne croit pas tout de suite"). Nonetheless, as the critic readily admits, prestige can never be an adequate substitute for truth. The ultimate criterion by which to judge the quality of a statement is still the notion of a perceptible reality – even if its recognition is somewhat delayed ("à la longue on se rend compte que c'est une réalité").<sup>25</sup> It will vindicate any statement which has erroneously been dismissed as wrong or un-true, regardless of the one who has uttered it.

As to *tinge* (clarity): Clarity, the final criterion of skilful language use, manifests itself in three ways: First, clarity in the structure of an argument: An argument is defined as "reasons that support a conclusion, sometimes formulated so that the conclusion is deduced from premises." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1985: 507). It is thus characterized by an inherent complexity in

---

<sup>25</sup> This points to another facet of the complex notion of truth, which Parkin terms 'efficacy': a prediction becomes real and is thus considered 'true', whether or not a logical relationship exists between the prediction and reality (Parkin 1984: 354) As has been pointed out earlier on, one of the aims of a debate is to ensure the successful implementation of a decision or project. This, however, largely depends on the collaboration of the entire group (sharing the expenses, distributing the workload). Now, if an audience dismisses a proposition as 'untrue', they may well be affirmed in their view, for the one who has made the proposition is likely to face considerable difficulties in translating his ideas into action. He can thus not prove it 'true', for he is not capable of rendering it a matter of fact.

which at least two elements – reason and conclusion – are related in a logical relationship. It is the task of the speaker to work out this relationship and render it as neat as possible. Secondly, there is clarity in the structure of a speech: The quest for clarity does not only hold for the individual argument, but also for the structure of the entire discourse, for “a discourse that seeks to persuade or convince is not made up of an accumulation of disorderly arguments infinite in number; on the contrary, it requires an organisation of selected arguments presented in the order that will give them the greatest force.” (Perelman and Sloan 1983: 804). As regards the style of delivery, this means that any form of redundancy, superfluous decorum and useless digression ought to be avoided, for they risk confusing rather than elucidating the line of reasoning. And, finally, there is clarity in the structure of the speech event: An argument gains much of its compelling force by being in the right place at the right time. Its relevance must be made apparent. A speaker is hence advised to position himself within the ongoing debate by highlighting his point of departure in referring to earlier contributions or suggesting further issues worthy of consideration and debate. This technique is beneficial to both disputants and audience who welcome it as a means of orientation. As the case study will show, speakers deploy a large number of linguistic devices to generate this kind of transparency, e.g. framing devices, meta-language or turn-taking markers. Given the requirement of clarity, it is not surprising that the Berba would attach some importance to the mental preparation of a speech:

YK: “Maintenant si un problème arrive à ton niveau, même si tu es femme, tu dois y réfléchir beaucoup avant de prendre la parole. Ensuite tu essaieras de dire, de parler clairement pour que les gens puissent te comprendre.” (Int. 09/04/96)

NK: “On doit savoir d’abord où on va. Sinon, on va mal parler.” (Int. 13/03/96)

### 3.3.2. Social competence

So far, we have considered the requirement of ‘constructiveness’ in terms of linguistic skills, the speaker’s ability to communicate his ideas and contribute to

the successful outcome of the debate. Yet there is another dimension to it, too. The purpose-orientation of the event renders linguistic skill not an end in itself, but puts it in the service of a grander objective, namely the solution of a communal problem. To make a constructive contribution, in turn, means to act in a socially appropriate way. The moral dimension is thereby not confined to the referential content of the proposition or degree to which it actually helps to settle a problem, but extends to the speech event itself, i.e. the conditions in which constructive talk can place at all. In other words, we are talking about the speaker's capacity to generate and preserve an atmosphere of good-will, openness and friendly relations. It is his social competence which is required. In drawing on the general principles of Berba ethics outlined in the last chapter (and in anticipation of the results of the final chapter) the following maxims of appropriateness in speech behaviour can be formulated:

- a) Comply with the egalitarian principle governing the speech situation and treat the other disputants as equal partners in the debate.
- b) Share your knowledge and insights with others. Do not exclude them from a deeper understanding. Do not withhold important pieces of information.
- c) Observe the rules of respect and adjust your language to the social standing of the addressee.
- d) Avoid any utterance which could engender a serious conflict, such as ridicule or verbal aggression. The severity of an offence against this rule is measured against both the intentions of the speaker and the matter at stake. Deliberate aggression in an otherwise peaceful debate is perceived much more negatively than a harsh remark spontaneously made in the course of a heated dispute.
- e) If a conflict emerges, speak or intervene in a way which helps to pacify the situation and restore a peaceful atmosphere (mediating quality).

The emphasis on conflict avoidance advocates a rhetoric of indirectness, of cautious wording and allusion. Given the ethical dimension of political language use, it comes as no surprise that it is the quality of *yamfumə*, coolness or self-control, which figures as one of the most important qualities of a renowned speaker:



PR: "C'est important de parler clairement et avec gentillesse (*yamfumə*). Tu ne vas pas forcer quelqu'un à faire la chose. Si tu ne parles pas avec gentillesse – qui va t'écouter?" (Int. 04/06/95)

NK: "Si quelqu'un est *yamfumə*, il faut savoir que sa bile ne coule pas tout le temps... on va écouter celui qui peut te faire comprendre. C'est mieux que rester à côté de celui qui s'énervé. S'il s'énervé, il ne sait pas ce qu'il dit. Si quelqu'un te prend durement à partie, tu perds la contenance et tu ne résoudras jamais un problème." (Int. 08/06/95)

According to the critics, only someone who has learned to control his temper will succeed in a political debate. Instead of making thoughtless comments, following a sudden impulse ("s'il s'énervé, il ne va pas comprendre ce qu'il dit"), the speaker takes his time to carefully choose his words and contemplate the impact of his proposition in advance. Thanks to the cautious design of his discourse he is able to communicate his ideas ("te faire comprendre") and by that contribute to the solution of a problem. It is this ideal of coolness which also accounts for some reactions that strike the outside observer in a political debate as unusual. When tension mounts and a conflict is about to break out, it is not rare to observe disputants making visible efforts to calm down and regain their balance. They deliberately lower their voice, in the attempt not to sound overtly aggressive, look down at the ground, instead of regarding the person they are addressing. In extreme situations, they even get up and stand to one side for a moment to cool down. It also explains the intervention by other participants who wish to prevent their friends from making interjections they would regret later on. Contained in PR's remark is a hint at the kind of sanctions which a violation of these maxims can entail (provided the participants are united in their indignation). While in cases of minor importance, the speaker is 'sent to Coventry' ("qui va t'écouter"), he will be told off and denied the most basic rights in the discussion if his conduct is considered a gross offence.

As the analysis has revealed, the notion of quality in political language use is to a large extent determined by the nature and objective of the speech event. A

political debate is a speech event where villagers come together to discuss and resolve issues of communal concern. The way to accomplish this goal is by exchanging a maximum amount of information and ideas until a consensus is reached. The conception of 'quality' in speech behaviour follows accordingly: 'good' is what advances an acceptable decision, 'bad' is what stands in its way. For the speaker, this means a double challenge for his rhetorical skills: on the one hand, he is required to communicate ideas, provide information and persuasively argue a case. In terms of speech behaviour, this translates into a diction of clarity, truth/ evidence and substantiveness. On the other hand, there is the obligation to behave in a way which fosters a fruitful debate and preserves an atmosphere of good-will and friendly relations. Here, the apposite means is cautious wording and the deployment of devices of indirection in order to avoid discord and friction. The delicate task, then, is to keep the balance between clarity and indirection, and to deliver a discourse which is explicit and seemly at the same time. With this background in mind, we shall now leave the domain of political language for a moment and explore the notion of quality and skill in two different speech genres, storytelling and proverb speaking. As the analysis will reveal, there are striking similarities in both the evaluative framework and the ideal of verbal practice.

## Chapter IV: *swombəfə* and the art of storytelling

The first tradition of verbal art among the Berba, which we will inspect in detail, is the art of storytelling. It is one of the most popular oral literary traditions, and people pay great attention to the artistic and aesthetic qualities of a performance and the narrative skills of the speaker.<sup>1</sup> The genre itself is called *swombəfə* (pl. *swombi*). It denotes stories or tales which are exclusively told for entertainment purposes during the 'period of the new yams', an annual festive season from the middle/ end of August until mid October. As regards formal and referential aspects, *swombi* have a great deal in common with tales documented from other African storytelling traditions (Ben-Amos 1975a, b; Cancel 1989; Cosentino 1982; Finnegan 1967; Jackson 1982a; Ndong 1983; Zwernemann 1985). Their language is ordinary *byali*, the problems dealt with are, for the most part, mundane problems, whether the protagonists are human characters or belong to the animal world.

Before exploring the notion of quality in the tradition of storytelling, I will briefly outline the context in which storytelling takes place. Only with this background knowledge in mind are we in a position to fully comprehend the indigenous discourse in which the evaluative framework is developed.

### 1. Storytelling season and storytelling session

The storytelling season formally opens at the end of August with the harvest of the first yams and closes at the beginning of the dry season in mid October after the first beans have been gathered in.<sup>2</sup> During this time, people come together

---

<sup>1</sup> As a comparison with analytically related forms shows, the genre is essentially defined by its function and context of use. Identical in terms of form and structure, yet generically distinguished are *kundebi* and a sub-category of *kwankyame* (proverb). While *kundebi* (sg. *kundefə*) refer to tales which are exclusively told in the initiation camp, *kwankyame* denote tales which are deployed in a conversational speech context to make an argument or illustrate a point (parable).

<sup>2</sup> Unlike other cultural precepts which gradually get watered down, the rules underpinning the storytelling tradition, in particular its temporal limitation, are strictly

in the evening to celebrate the end of the farming year, to eat and drink together and to entertain each other with riddling and storytelling. Usually these sessions are very informal. Friends and relatives gather around the open fire in a compound at leisure hour, chat and tell each other stories until bedtime. In this relaxed and intimate atmosphere, men, women and children participate alike, displaying equal skill and enthusiasm. The situation differs slightly in large-scale storytelling sessions which, apart from offering light entertainment, also constitute important social events. These sessions, which I had the chance to witness on several occasions, are most impressive in their elaborate style and festive character. They are formally announced and carefully planned a long time in advance. A sumptuous meal of porridge, rice, piled yams and meat is prepared and plenty of palm wine and millet beer provided. Usually the event starts in the late afternoon, when all the guests have arrived and taken their place in the enclosure of the compound. The seating plan reflects the social status of the participants. Male elders and guests of honour sit down in an inner circle, around which elderly women, young men and children group. Young and middle-aged women who are busy with cooking, serving the guests and looking after the small children are unlikely to actively participate in the event and follow it from a distance instead. After one of the most honoured guests has opened the session with an introductory tale, anyone regardless of age or sex is free to enter the inner circle and relate his or her story. With only a few breaks when food and drinks are served, these sessions tend to last until late in the night, sometimes even until dawn. The following morning, after an extended breakfast, the guests return home. In former times, even veritable storytelling contests were held, where 'storytelling clubs' of different villages vied for eloquence and repertory.<sup>3</sup> Having sketched the context in which storytelling

---

observed. A taboo warns: "If you tell a tale outside of the story telling season, the scorpions will creep out of the beans and bite you!" Yet, it is presumably less the fear of the fatal consequences of a rule violation – the taboo is not taken too seriously – than pragmatic reasons which explain that people keep to the time frame. To stay up, celebrate and tell stories throughout the night is only possible in a season of the year when there are few work constraints. When the harvest of millet, beans and *voandzou* begins in the early dry season, every hand is needed and people have to be well rested.

<sup>3</sup> "Les membres d'un club sont initiés à tous les âges, parce qu'on choisit d'abord ceux qui sont forts. On appelle, par exemple, une femme forte ou un enfant qui est resté beaucoup auprès des vieux, un enfant qui 'connaît' aussi." (NN in Int. 14/02/92).

takes place, what are the characteristic features of the delivery of a tale, the storytelling performance?

## 2. Storytelling performance

A storytelling performance usually begins with a brief verbal exchange between storyteller and audience. To capture the audience's attention, a storyteller loudly shouts "*swomba swomba*" – "I tell a story!" into the round. Having received the appropriate answer "*pore nampo*" – "We are ready!" he will start his tale. There is no tradition of giving the tale a title. The end is usually introduced by the closing formula "*n de mwanem*" – "that's why" – which marks a shift in perspective and presents the storyteller's personal point of view, whether it takes the form of a comment, a moral or an etiologic explanation.

The particularities of Berba storytelling practice become most conspicuous when compared to other African storytelling traditions. While most accounts highlight the 'theatrical' element as one of the most remarkable and characteristic features, the performance of a tale resembling a joint enactment rather than a simple, text-centred narration (Finnegan 1967: 93-98; Noss 1970: 41; Jackson 1982a: 66; Ndong 1983: 28) the histrionic factor is notably absent from a Berba performance. Instead it is the *word* which dominates the event and lends it its unique character. This concerns the (verbal) behaviour of both speaker and audience. The narrative style is distinguished by a renunciation of non-verbal devices. Rarely does a storyteller move around or engage in any other sort of illustrative or dramatizing activity. Even gestures and facial expressions are used only sparingly, and if they are, they follow standard patterns of expressive behaviour such as covering the mouth with the right hand to indicate astonishment, or raising the eyebrow for disbelief. Despite certain differences according to the temper and narrative skills of the individual speaker, the delivery appears, in general, lucid and straightforward. Remarkably few storytellers stutter, hesitate or pause in mid-sentence. Noticeable delays only occur at a moment of code-switching such as the short pause preceding direct speech. The phrases tend to be uttered in a clear and even manner, with greater emphasis and more articulate pronunciation only towards a climax or

*pointe* (including chortling or the adoption of a more serious tone).<sup>4</sup> Even if a story contains a song, its tune – usually a little varied alternation between three or four tones – allows for the clear comprehension of each single word.

The renunciation of dramatic devices is paralleled by limited participatory activity on the part of the audience. The only form of patterned response is the instant repetition of each single sentence by a selected group of listeners (two to six people, often close friends of the storyteller) if not the entire audience. Apart from this regular interference, the storyteller is rarely interrupted or disturbed. There is no musical accompaniment, no drumming, dancing or hand-clapping. Even if a song is performed, the audience will neither join in nor take the part of a responding chorus. Additionally, the rule holds that the listeners must neither criticize nor comment upon the narrative while it is being related. An exception is the utterance of brief exclamations to express amazement or satisfaction, or the spontaneous anticipation of a sentence in which case the storyteller would take up the phrase and repeat it as if no other continuation was conceivable. Again, this contrasts sharply with other African storytelling traditions, where the audience is reported to have a crucial impact on the final shape of the performance by joining the songs, dancing or commenting on the story. They no longer appear as mere recipients but as active participants in a dramatic communicative event (Duranti and Brenneis 1986; Herskovits and Herskovits 1958: 169; Noss 1979: 8).

Although no overt criticism is heard, there is nonetheless ready evidence of whether or not a performance is a success. It is expressed in much more subtle ways, through body language or voice modulation. Frequently, while the narrative unfolds people start giggling before finally bursting out into laughter. Their facial expression reflects the move from eager expectation to amusement. At other times, the audience listens rather carefully and only rarely spontaneous exclamations like “*to!*” (exclamation of agreement, approval) or “*magara*,

---

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘climax’ has a double connotation, denoting rise in tension, importance etc. but also its acme. For analytical reasons it is important to distinguish between those two aspects. I have thus opted for the French ‘*pointe*’ (instead of climax or acme) to indicate the culminating point of a climax. It seems particularly apt, for it connotes wit and surprise at a turning point, aspects which perfectly correspond to the Berba conceptual framework of narration.

*magerə!*” (“right, just, true”) are heard. Finally, there are those performances where almost any emphatic reaction is lacking. Repetitions come slowly and incompletely and the sluggish reaction of the audience resembles the polite fulfilment of a behavioural norm rather than a genuine interest in the narrative. Overall, there are many ways to express approval and dislike, by nuancing the standard patterns of behaviour which underpin the interaction between audience and storyteller. To withhold laughter, to repeat only the last few words, or, worse, to demonstrate boredom and a lack of interest is as telling as a straightforward critique.

Two points follow from the description: First of all, a storytelling performance is essentially marked by the notion of art for art’s sake. Due to the triple framing of storytelling season, session and performance, the audience’s attention is directed towards nothing but the act of telling a tale. It is the genre and nothing else which is to the fore. There is a great aesthetic expectation on the part of the audience, who will watch the performance in high awareness of the genre’s constituent elements and critically assess the speaker’s skill in complying with them. In a large-scale event, the notion of quality is even more prominent since no storyteller will relate more than three or four stories at a time and people have plenty of opportunity to compare the individual performances and develop a sense of qualitative differences.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, one of the most remarkable features of the Berba tradition of storytelling is its word or text-centredness. It is not gestures, not enactment, but words which are at the heart of a storytelling performance. This impression is reinforced by one of the most unique features of this oral tradition, namely the sentence-by-sentence repetition of the narrative by the audience. In reiterating each utterance, the focus is drawn exclusively to the text, to the storyteller’s version of the tale. As regards narrative power, this

---

<sup>5</sup> It is an unspoken rule not to interrupt a speaker’s presentation. Everybody has the right to relate his tale the way he likes, whether or not the audience approves of the narrative. Disagreement can always be expressed by nuancing the standard patterns of behaviour. If the audience should feel compelled to stop a speaker because of an unbearably embarrassing or indecent performance (as I experienced once) they may simply refuse to pay attention when he announces the next narrative by “*swomba, swomba!*”

technique is likely to effect a greater involvement – cognitive and emotive – in the plot. The listener's thoughts are prevented from digressing; in taking the part of the storyteller for a moment (although in a merely echoing function), he is obliged to concentrate on the main story line. The brief retardation of each narrative step through the repetition of the preceding phrase may also heighten feelings of tension and anticipated joy.<sup>6</sup> Let us now turn to the main subject of our investigation, the question of quality assessment.

### 3. Quality assessment in the Berba tradition of storytelling

The analysis is based on an interview with five male storytellers and critics, aged between 20 and 70, which took place on 14 February 1992 in the hamlet Nwarehu.<sup>7</sup> My starting point in exploring the conceptual framework of 'quality' was the basic question:

AC: "Existent-ils des bons contes? Ou des mauvais contes?"<sup>8</sup>

The answers are revealing:

BT: "Quand tu racontes un mauvais conte, personne ne va rire. Si c'est un bon conte tu vas constater que tout le monde est en joie."

MB: "Quand quelqu'un raconte, même depuis le début, on peut être sûr que les gens vont pleurer. Mais plus souvent, c'est l'amusement. Le rire montre que le conte est très important."

---

<sup>6</sup> This performative feature also raises interesting theoretical questions regarding the identity of the participants in a storytelling performance (a momentary inversion of roles, the listener becoming the storyteller and the storyteller becoming the listener) and the nature of the genre (e.g. whether we are dealing with a monologic or a dialogic genre. In contrast to expressive forms such as prayer, which have aptly been described as 'dialogic monologues', a Berba storytelling performance appears as a 'monologic dialogue').

<sup>7</sup> The statements were translated from *byali* into French by M. Dari N'Ouéni.

<sup>8</sup> There are two terms to indicate quality: *suli*, denoting 'good' in general (i.e. anything which is met with approval) and *na(a)ri*, meaning interesting, to be appreciated with the senses, aesthetically pleasing (food may be *nari*, but also a witty proverb, a pleasant imagery, a lucid tale delivery, an insightful thought).



In answering a question as to a tale's quality, it is not textual, i.e. formal-structural or propositional aspects, which are mentioned first. Instead it is the emotive reaction on the part of the audience – laughter ("rire") and sadness or consternation ("pleurer") – which serves as a primary evaluative criterion. According to the critics, then, a storytelling performance is conceived as a communicative event in which the speaker is expected to trigger a certain kind of reaction in his audience by means of a skilful performance. Since we are dealing with a distinctly *artistic* genre (see above), this reaction can be equalled to an aesthetic experience. What also readily emerges from the statements is that the quality of the tale is seen as intimately linked with the narrative skills of the speaker. And indeed, as later evidence will show, it is not the tale *per se* but the art of *telling* it which is at the heart of the indigenous quality assessment.

What does this art consist of and what accounts for the success of a narrative? To answer these questions let us begin with the notion of an aesthetic experience. What brings it about and what follows for the structural and propositional features of a tale? I shall first consider the nature of laughter, for it is this kind of reaction which is of paramount importance in the indigenous criticism. Consternation or thoughtfulness – the second desired effect – will be explained accordingly.

### 3.1. The nature of laughter in a storytelling performance

AC: "Est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose qui garantit que les gens vont rire?"

BT: "Avant de démarrer ,tu sais que, si tu dis telle chose beaucoup de gens vont rire. Les histoires d'adultère, par exemple. La vérité – on ne rit pas parce que c'est sérieux [...] On peut raconter un conte sur le lion, la panthère où on va arriver à un certain point où les gens vont rire. A ce point tu peux placer une parole, où les gens vont trouver la vérité ou un peu de mensonge dedans, et c'est là, qu'ils vont commencer à rire. Le mensonge, par exemple, où quelqu'un a trompé l'autre."

As we will see, this complex answer provides the key to an understanding of the nature of laughter in a storytelling performance. Right at the beginning, one aspect is affirmed which has already been noted as one of the most conspicuous features of Berba storytelling: its text-centredness: “si tu *dis* telle chose, beaucoup des gens vont rire”. Thus, it is the spoken word and not ‘drama’ or ‘enactment’ which is thought to achieve the desired effect. Yet, as the critic further explains, it is not the word *per se*, its semantic or moral value, which achieves this effect, but the word, which takes a *specific position in the text*, more precisely the word at the end of a textual unit, whether it be the entire story or a referential unit within (“arriver à un certain point”). It is only by reference to the preceding text, the plot development, that the meaning of this word effectively unfolds. From this point of view “la parole” easily translates into the *pointe* of a text, or, with regard to the nature of the emotive reaction, the punchline of a joke.

The notion of a textual entity leads to further considerations as to the structure and content of a tale. First of all, we can presume the existence of a climax, which results from the inherent logic in the plot development and raises a specific expectation of a possible ending, whether it be a cogent conclusion or a surprising turn in the plot. Secondly, it can be assumed that the expectation is greatest when the story starts from a set problem or an initial conflict which, from the very beginning, calls for a solution at a turning point. Textual and contextual evidence corroborate this assertion. As a survey of 206 *swombi* shows, 175 out of 206 tales display the narrative structure ‘set-problem – climax – *pointe*’, whether this concerns the story as a whole or self-contained sequences found in more complex tales.<sup>9</sup> The notion of conflict or set-problem is also to the fore when local critics reflect on favourite topics which promise a successful performance. Thus, as I was told, a ‘better’ tale would deal with “les histoires d’adultère”, “le mensonge, par exemple, là où quelqu’un a trompé l’autre”, “les problèmes des femmes” or “l’hyène [...] parce que les autres animaux arrivent souvent à la tromper” (Int. 14/ 02/92). Common to all of these subjects is that they are all associated, in one way or another, with conflict

---

<sup>9</sup> For an in-depth analysis of tale structures see Paulme (1972).

situations. A treacherous wife runs into serious difficulties because of her sinful conduct, while the greedy and malicious hyena will inevitably cause some trouble, due to its disposition to try to deceive other animals. An important concept in this regard is that of stock characters. The ascription of specific qualities to a certain tale character enhances the curiosity and anticipation on the part of the audience, since the direction of the plot is predictable and further developments can be guessed from the onset. This applies not only to individual figures but also includes pairs of tale characters, such as the poor and the rich or the hare and hyena. Their very disposition of cunning versus greed and viciousness predicts a turbulent plot which is most likely to end with the hyena's defeat and hence warrants a good laugh.

Last but not least, there are behavioural patterns, which also support the idea of a 'climax – *pointe*' structure: the voice modulation by the speaker, who puts more emphasis on the words as the narration unfolds, and the audience's eager expectation, the growing tension, the giggling which finally vents in a burst of laughter. In drawing on the theories by leading geleotologists, at least two sources of laughter can be identified. This allows us, in turn, to ascertain structural and propositional features which precondition and indicate the quality of a tale.

### 3.1.1. Structural requirements: clarity

First of all, we can assume the enjoyment of the figure 'climax – *pointe*', which entails an increase in tension and a growing expectancy up to a turning point, where "laughter occurs in a situation of relief" (Gregory 1924: 203). The satisfaction is essentially emotive. In terms of structural aspects this means that a story must display at least one quality:

KK: "Si tu composes un conte, et ça existe, et c'est clair (*tinge*),  
les gens vont rire."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> One also finds *lesi*, connoting lucidity, and *lege*, denoting something 'logical, consistent'.

Without a clear structure, i.e. a logical order in the succession of propositional units, the listener will be unable to comprehend the plot development, and hence miss out on the aesthetic experience of climax and *pointe*, tension and release.

### 3.1.2. Propositional requirements: insight and substantiveness

Yet, it is not only structural aspects which account for the success of a tale performance. In his investigation of the “Psychology of Laughter” R. Piddington suggests another source of emotive satisfaction when he defines laughter as “a response when social sentiments are damaged in a particular way...and therefore it is a social sanction” (1933: 122). He goes on to say that “what it comes to is [...] if an individual’s words or actions are contrary to his society’s scheme of evaluations, he runs risk of exposure to ridicule.” (1933: 136-37). As has been shown elsewhere, tale characters, albeit fictitious, are judged like human beings; their character and deeds are assessed against the prevailing scheme of social norms and values (Czekelius, 1993b). Hence, although Piddington’s analysis is focused on laughter in human interaction, we can reasonably assume that his explanation also holds for laughter in a storytelling performance. A scrutiny of the emic evaluative discourse confirms this view. Critics seem to almost anticipate Piddington’s view in noting that laughter would occur when the plot did “conduire la personne mauvaise à la perte.” The recipient is expected to be aware of the character’s inept behaviour (“personne mauvaise”). It is in the moment of laughter that he exhibits his disapproval of the character’s conduct and displays satisfaction with his just punishment (“la perte”). In a sense, then, laughter can be interpreted as an audible expression of the validation of existing norms and values which have been jeopardized by a negative, i.e. anti-social and immoral, character. This brings us to the second evaluative criterion: substantiveness.

IT: “Un conte doit être riche (*subi*).”

AC: “Qu’est-ce que signifie riche?”

IT: “Les lois, les conseils dedans. C’est la morale. Si les gens ne rien pas pendant un conte, le conte n’était pas riche.”

To IT, laughter is inextricably linked with the property of *subi*, richness or substantiveness, which he qualifies as “les lois, les conseils dedans”. The violation of norms and values calls for retaliation and social sanctioning. To avoid public ridicule – contained in the message of the tale – it is therefore advisable to comply with governing rules and behave in a socially acceptable manner.<sup>11</sup> A rich tale is thus synonymous with morality, insight and advice.

### 3.2. The nature of thoughtfulness and consternation in a storytelling performance

Laughter is not the only emotive reaction which a successful tale performance is thought to achieve. Pensive silence or even consternation are also regarded as evidence of the quality of a tale: “Il y a plusieurs contes: certains peuvent te sauver”, “les gens vont trouver la vérité dedans” and “les gens vont pleurer”. In the preceding analysis, laughter has been interpreted as the public disapproval of anti-social behaviour. Implied in this ridicule was the reaffirmation of existing social norms and values. With “trouver la vérité” this indirectness is not given. Instead, the tale characters behave in an *exemplary* manner, hence demonstrate *correct* behaviour. The listener will find that it is concordant with the society’s normative framework and approve it as just and true.

So far, the perception of quality and aesthetic experience has been discussed exclusively in terms of the main body of the text, i.e. the story told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator. Yet, a tale has one more dimension to it, which is also subject to critical evaluation and accounts for the success of a narrative. I am referring here to the conclusion by which a storyteller rounds off

---

<sup>11</sup> In the emic interpretation, laughter is understood as a clear indication of the disapproval of anti-norm behaviour. An interesting variant of this conception is suggested by Jackson (1982a and b) in his investigation of Kuranko storytelling. In taking a psychoanalytical approach, he views storytelling as a means to open up an arena where cultural norms and values are critically reviewed and examined. A key factor in this process is the inherent ambiguity of tales which allows for different approaches to the same text. Laughter may hence not only evince a person’s belief in the society’s normative framework, but operate as a catalyst and express mixed feelings towards morally disapproved but personally accepted or even admired behaviour.

his tale. It is the most flexible and creative part of a *swombəfə* and reveals in a most conspicuous way the speaker's wit and convictions.

DN: "Ce que l'un va donner comme conclusion, ne sera pas la même chez l'autre conteur. Ça doit changer aussi un peu."

Despite the recognition of individual differences, people nonetheless distinguish between good and bad conclusions:

KK: "Dans un bon conte, la conclusion n'est pas longue. On résume un peu seulement. On dit: "Voilà, depuis ce jour ça existe." "

According to KK, the quality of a tale is evinced by the brevity of its conclusion. The pivot linking the two narrative elements is 'consistency'. A good narrative stands out because its subject matter has been presented in such a consistent way that a brief conclusion suffices to sum up its essence. A 'good' conclusion is therefore distinguished by conciseness and wit.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, what can be said about the nature of the aesthetic experience, and, following from it, the properties of an approved narrative? The pleasure in a storytelling performance derives, firstly, from the enjoyment of the sensation of 'tension – release', resulting from the structural pattern 'climax – *pointe*' and secondly, the affirmation of existing norms and values, as well as the transmission of insight and advice in the plot and/ or conclusion. This has two implications: a) the emotive reaction is predicated upon cognition. A tale relies essentially on the listener's comprehension of and intellectual participation in the plot, for effect. And b) the quintessential properties of a good tale (and with it the preconditions for a successful performance) are closure and coherence.

---

<sup>12</sup> This conception runs counter to current trends in oral literature studies where textual and contextual features are seen as resisting conventional literary analysis because of their dynamic character and fragmentary qualities. In fact, it is intriguing how well Western written literary criticism describes the Berba sense of closure and coherence in an oral tale where "when the reader gets to the end, he or she experiences gratification, for the discourse has concluded rather than merely coming to a stop, and it can now be reviewed and experienced as a totality." (Barber 1991: 22).

Climax and *pointe* are only enjoyable if the plot logically unfolds, the value of a moral becomes evident only if the story line has consistently developed (e.g. the just punishment of a bad character), and a conclusion, to be valued, must cogently follow from the text. Structural and propositional features are hence linked in an intimate relationship. Whether climax, *pointe*, moral or conclusion, each element contributes to and gains its meaning from the inherent logic that connects the various parts of a tale. It is somewhat ironic that the Berba conceive of an *oral* story or its self-contained sub-sections as a *text* in the perfect sense of *written* literary criticism, where “each element has a determinate role to play which depends on its precise position within the text and its precise relations to the other parts.” (Barber 1991: 22).

#### 4. The art of storytelling

Given that the success of a storytelling performance depends on the production of an insightful, carefully structured and coherent text – what follows for the notion of narrative skills? What does a speaker have to do in order to impart an aesthetic experience?

##### 4.1. Linguistic aspects

AC: “Qu’est-ce qui caractérise un bon conteur?”

BT: “(C’est) celui, qui raconte couramment et doucement, lentement (*ywagəywagi*) il explique la chose clairement, et vous allez trouver que c’est clair.”

DN: “Un conteur ne doit pas non plus ‘mentir (*yósi*)’ dedans. Il ne doit pas poser des questions dedans. Tout doit être clair.”

According to the critics, it is the fluent narrative and swift plot development which make the tale’s inherent logic transparent. The speaker therefore needs to give a careful and quiet narration (“doucement, lentement”) in which the different sequences are presented in a logical order so that future scenarios can consistently be developed. Moreover, a storyteller is expected to “expliquer la chose clairement”, i.e. expound the subject in such a lucid way that its essence

("conclusion", "conseil") can conclusively be deduced from the main text. In terms of linguistic skills, then, any stylistic device must be avoided that is likely to impede the clarity and straightforwardness of the narration. Neither should the storyteller "mentir dedans", i.e. confuse the plot by presenting divergent views or facts at the same time, for it would hinder the listener from perceiving the text as a coherent entity. Nor should he ask any questions within, for he would risk not only conveying a sense of uncertainty on his part, but also diverting the audience's mind from the main story line. In pondering possible answers, the audience might fail to fully concentrate on the presented text. In a similar vein, any form of redundancy, such as lengthy descriptions or vocal illustrations (ideophones) which do not necessarily contribute to the logic of the plot, should be avoided since they equally bear the risk of distracting the listener from the main strand of thought.

#### 4.2. Behavioural aspects

Narrative skill is not confined to linguistic devices but extends to behavioural aspects as well:

BT: "En racontant, ils peuvent même danser, montrer ce qui se passe, mais il y a certains qui ne vont rien faire que raconter ça couramment et calmement et ils vont vous battre. Quand tu fais des gestes, il y a des mensonges dedans."

According to BT, it is neither necessary nor advisable to accompany the tale with gestures in the attempt to illustrate what happens ("montrer ce qui se passe"). By using visual devices the storyteller risks diverting the listener's attention away from the text, if he does not entirely confuse him with movements that eventually contradict the plot ("mensonge"). In either case, his performance will be disapproved of, since it impedes a clear understanding of the tale and an aesthetic satisfaction through performance. The storyteller will compare badly to other speakers ("ils vont vous battre").

Since a storytelling performance is an essentially communicative event, we have to also consider the audience's behavioural pattern in exploring the evaluative framework. Provided the audience expects the storyteller to enable



them to experience emotive and cognitive satisfaction, it is reasonable to assume that they will adjust their behaviour accordingly. The observations during a storytelling event affirm this point. As we have noted above, it is the speaker's version of the tale which dominates the scene. He will neither be interrupted nor will the audience 'liven up' the narration with their own creative contributions. The only form of active participation consists of the instant repetition of each single phrase uttered by the storyteller. On the premise that the aesthetic experience is predicated upon the comprehension of the plot, repetition is an important stylistic device to improve this effect, for it helps to exclusively focus the audience's attention on the text. The mental involvement also explains the spontaneous anticipation of certain sentences by the listeners. Whether or not the tale is already known to the listener, if he has been able to follow the plot so far, he is in a position where he can guess at its further development. In a moment of excitement, such as the approach of a climax or a turning point, he may blur out a sentence which, to him, represents the logical continuation of the plot. If the phrase indeed fits the scenario, the storyteller will repeat it and resume the narrative as if no other version had been conceivable.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. Creativity

Underlying the discussion on quality assessment has been the recognition of individual differences in the delivery of tales. This presumes a phenomenon which can by no means be taken for granted, namely creativity, the individual and creative use of verbal material. It not only provides the basis for a judgement of the storyteller's skills, but accounts for the competitive character of some storytelling events "il va vous battre" or "se préparer pour la lutte".

In his essay "Creation and the Gbaya Tale", P. Noss (1979) notes how little the idea of creativity has been explored in the study of African storytelling traditions. Structuralists engage in detailed analyses of the variability of tales, yet despite their awareness of *variants* of the same tale, their focus is

---

<sup>13</sup> Thus, what to the outside observer conveys the impression of a fully standardized tale, collectively memorized word-for-word and passed down in an unchanged version, derives, in fact, from the mental participation by the listeners.

exclusively on meaning, while questions of creativity remain untouched. Folklorists, too, display little interest in the subject since their theoretical perspective is predicated upon the notion of a common owner- and authorship which by definition excludes the possibility of an individual creativity. Last but not least, there are local genre conceptions which rule out such a kind of inquiry. With reference to the Gbaya tale tradition Noss shows that a tale is definitionally anchored in the past. Perceived as part of the ancestral legacy, it is said to be passed down in an unchanged version from one generation to the next. Creation, then, is by definition inconceivable. In asking indigenous storytellers, however, whether they were aware of new compositions, they respond in the affirmative.

In contrast to the Gbaya, creativity is not only a recognized fact, but a constituent element of the Berba tradition of storytelling, underpinning both the generic framework and the notion of quality. Following Noss, at least two forms of creativity can be distinguished: creation and recreation. While creation denotes the new composition of a tale, recreation refers to the mental preparation for a storytelling performance (1979: 1-9). In the subsequent part I shall examine the impact of both forms of creativity on the perception of narrative skill. In extension of the definition suggested by Noss, *recreation* thereby pertains not only to the mental preparation prior to the performance, but refers to the entire process of reproducing a tale.

### 5.1. Recreation

To comprehend the exigencies in the recreative process, we have to know something more about the genre conception itself, more specifically, the tale template which the storyteller is expected to reproduce. The Berba are very much aware of the fact that there is no such thing as a word-for-word memorisation that would ensure the transmission of a tale throughout generations in an unchanged version. To them, the identity of a tale is established by the characteristics of the plot development.

IT: "Alors, un conte depuis son invention ne change pas. On peut aussi considérer la mentalité des gens. Souvent on peut raconter le même conte, mais les paroles vont changer."

MB: "Si quelqu'un a compris, il doit savoir que c'est le même conte, mais il y a des mots qui sont un peu changés dedans."

As regards narrative skill, then, a speaker is expected to keep to the main story line which constitutes the authentic core of a tale.<sup>14</sup> To this end, he will have to carefully prepare himself prior to the performance and *fix* the tale, as Noss terms it, i.e. recollect the main details of the plot development before relating it. Apart from that, he is free to choose his own wording, although he is strongly advised to shape his delivery according to the basic principles of artful storytelling, if he wishes to attain success. In this context, it should be noted that the assessment of narrative skills differs slightly, depending on whether or not the audience is acquainted with the tale. While in the latter case the focus is on wit, coherence and style, it is authenticity, i.e. faithfulness to the tale template, which serves as the primary evaluative criterion in the case of well-known *swombi*. This distinct approach accounts for the opposing views listeners had on one and the same tale related by a villager who had just returned from Ghana. While the majority were convinced that they were listening to a newly invented tale (as the speaker had in fact claimed), two members of the audience, who had also been to Ghana, recognized it as the modified version of a popular Ashanti narrative. The judgement differed accordingly. Those who were familiar with the tale acknowledged the narrative skills of the storyteller, yet dismissed the performance on the grounds that the speaker had 'falsified' the tale with his

---

<sup>14</sup> Admittedly, the question of 'authenticity' in an oral culture is a difficult one. There is no fixed point of reference which would determine whether a tale is a hybrid, an aberration from a defined original scheme, or a regional variant which is claimed to be authentic itself. Nonetheless, the Berba are very clear about the identity of popular tale templates, whereby the decisive factor is the recognizable structure of the plot development. A certain scope for variation is conceded in serial tales, i.e. tales which feature a chain of various sequences, all of which, however, display the same quality, emanating from and contributing to the main plot (e.g. the protagonist has to resolve different tasks). The greatest disagreement seems to rest with tales that are extremely complex, featuring parallel strings of action and developing in different directions. One way to try to extract (or at least approach) the authentic core of a tale is by comparing as many versions as possible and extract recurring patterns.

high-handed alterations, while the rest of the audience approved of the performance as thoroughly enjoyable (Int. 13/06/95). It would be incorrect, however, to put down the call for authenticity to a simply traditionalist attitude. Rather, it must be regarded as an expression of high esteem for the body of cultural lore, engendering a very specific aesthetic expectation on the part of the audience. As has been suggested above, those tales which are deemed worthy of memorisation are most likely those which comply with the canon of evaluative criteria. Hence, to fault unfaithfulness in the recreation of a tale also compounds the reproach of having foiled an aesthetic experience, which has been enjoyed and anticipated in advance.

## 5.2. Creation

As the following statement reveals, it is not only the artful relation of a tale but also an infinite repertory which distinguishes the skilled from the unskilled storyteller. This, in turn, presupposes a process of creation by which the stock of tales is constantly being expanded:

DN: “Le vrai conteur, c’est celui qui ne va jamais manquer de contes; il peut raconter pendant quatre jours sans manquer de contes. Même s’il manque de contes anciens il peut raconter un conte sur celui qui est venu à vélo ou celui qui est monté à cheval, il peut même raconter un conte sur le cahier que vous tenez!”

Apart from disposing of a profound knowledge of oral lore, which allows him to choose from a broad range of high quality tales, a true storyteller, then, is able to transform any material (“celui qui est venu à vélo”, “le cahier que vous tenez”) into a *swombəfə* according to the canon of oral literary conventions.

How can the creative process be described?

KK: “Avant de démarrer, c’est quand tu te couches la nuit, l’idée t’arrive et le lendemain tu peux inventer (*bə namə swombəfə*) [...] Quand tu dors, les images de ta paresse te donnent des idées pour inventer.” (Int. 08/06/95)

As with most other art forms, it is inspiration – “l'idée”, “les images” springing from the storyteller's mind – which stands at the beginning of the creative act. It is followed by the actual composition of the text, where images and ideas are woven together into a coherent and meaningful whole. The main sources of inspiration are, first, the corpus of popular tales:

KK : “Même si c'est un nouveau conte, il faut le baser sur des anciennes choses pour pouvoir raconter ça. Un bon conte doit parler des problèmes de femmes.” (Int. 08/06/95)

An ancient tale can reasonably be assumed to comply with the cultural standards of excellence, for otherwise it would not have been deemed worthy of memorisation and thus not have survived throughout generations.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore not surprising that authors of new tales should turn to the body of ancient, popular tales for inspiration. It provides a useful orientation as to what characters, plot developments, actions and morals to deploy and how to structure the text in order to impart an aesthetic experience. As we will recall from earlier findings, this includes the narrative pattern ‘set-problem – climax – *pointe*’, as well as a preference for issues or characters which, by their very nature, are prone to spark a conflict by violating given norms.

Another source of inspiration are events or characters of the environment. The process of composition is based on analogy:

---

<sup>15</sup> In contrast to written cultures, there seems to be an intimate relation between ancientness and quality in the lore of an oral society. Paper is patient, whereas people who have to memorize texts or templates are not. Although the survival of ‘bad’ or ‘useless’ pieces of lore cannot entirely be ruled out, the selection process is, in my opinion, fairly rigid. We ought not to forget that in an oral culture a ‘text’ constitutes an integral part of a communicative process, an ongoing interaction between a speaker and an addressee. Provided that a) there are no institutionalized guardians of oral lore (e.g. a royal historian, an epic singer) and b) the speaker depends on the approval of the addressee (i.e. there are no hierarchical differences between them), the bad quality of a text will inevitably make its impression on the one who has produced it. Once having experienced the dismissal of a performance due to the bad quality of the template, the speaker is likely to abstain from producing it again. Others will learn from his failure and avoid its recreation as well. Gradually, the piece will be forgotten, which equals the extinction of a piece of lore in an oral culture.

KK: "Pour composer un conte, on compare (*bə nwa*) des choses..." (Int. 08/06/95)

To compare things means to imagine and coin a metaphorical equivalent for a given (real-life) situation by means of analogic transfer (for an in-depth discussion of the concept of comparison and analogy see chapter 5).<sup>16</sup> It is predicated upon a careful observation of events in the surroundings and the capacity to translate abstract properties into pictorial language. A brief example may illustrate this point. It is drawn from an interview with five male storytellers, aged between 22 and 63, who were asked whether they could provide examples of new creations, and, if possible comment on the source which had inspired them.<sup>17</sup> NT, an elder aged 51, came forth with the following tale which he had composed several months before:

- 1 Once the elephant and the cock quarrelled.
- 2 The cock said: "I can eat much more than you."
- 3 The elephant said: "I can eat more than you."
- 4 The people took a stand full of sorghum and gave it to the elephant.
- 5 They took a stand full of sorghum and gave it to the cock.
- 6 The elephant climbed on the straw hut, and the cock climbed on it.
- 7 Both began to eat.
- 8 The cock realized that to defeat the elephant he had to descend.
- 9 He went to look for some sorghum in the droppings of the elephant and began to eat.
- 10 The people asked: "What are you doing?"
- 11 He said: "Ah! I have realized that what I had been given was not enough.
- 12 That is why I am now looking for some sorghum in the droppings of the elephant."
- 13 The elephant said: "Ah! If that is the case, I'd better escape.
- 14 If I live with him I will never be satisfied!"
- 15 That is why he fled and hid away in the forest.

---

<sup>16</sup> People disagree about the deployment of 'modern' terms such as bicycle, school, etc. While more conservative voices argue against the incorporation of such elements for aesthetic reasons, others speak in favour of tales that link up to contemporary times (Int. 18/06/95).

<sup>17</sup> The interview took place on 8 June 1995 in Matéri.

In a subsequent interview, the storyteller disclosed the background which had inspired him to the composition of this tale. Thanks to his industriousness and modesty, NT had been able to accumulate some wealth over the last decade. His prosperity had aroused the envy of his father's brothers, who attempted to spoil it by magic devices. After five years of suffering, NT finally decided to travel to neighbouring Burkina Faso in order to obtain a powerful antidote against his relatives' attacks. His mission was crowned by success. Shortly after his return, the antidote took effect and the uncles were obliged to beg his pardon and stop their ill machinations. In the tale NT expounds, he compares his relatives, exceeding him in age and rank, to the big, but stupid elephant. He sees himself in the position of the small and weak – portrayed by the cock – who overcomes the stronger one by wit and cleverness. To him, the story not only constitutes the translation of a real-life event into metaphorical language, but can also be understood as a parable on the relationship between the weak and the powerful in general: "I wanted to teach the children that a strong and older one can not defeat someone who is weak and younger than himself. The wit of the weak has driven the strong one into the woods, without him even noticing. The lesson I wanted to give is that one ought not to attack someone else, just because he is weak. The weak person may also defeat him."

In taking into account the competitive atmosphere which marks many storytelling events, the great care with which the Berba work up and prepare new creations before performing them for the first time becomes comprehensible.<sup>18</sup>

AC: "Où est-ce qu'on raconte des contes nouvellement inventés?"

MB: "Dans ta famille, à la maison."

IT: "On ne peut pas attendre la saison des contes. On peut se préparer n'importe quand. A la saison des contes tu vas les tester dans le groupe. Dans la famille tu observes la réaction de certains. Ils vont te critiquer."

---

<sup>18</sup> We ought not to forget that novel creations have to compete with popular tales whose content has been approved over time.

MB: “N’importe qui, qui peut corriger les mots. Aussi un autre conteur. S’il y a quelques mots pas corrects dedans, il va aussi composer pour lui, pour t’expliquer la partie qu’il a jugée mauvaise: “Il ne faut pas raconter ainsi!”, si ce n’est pas clair [...] On peut discuter. Si on dit, par exemple, ce n’est pas raisonnable, on peut t’expliquer les raisons.” (Int. 14/02/92)

What is interesting, is the practice of a ‘dress-rehearsal’ in which the effectiveness of the tale is tested on a small-scale audience. Again the notion of storytelling as a communicative event is to the fore. The narrative is related to friends and relatives in a private atmosphere. Unlike a public performance, criticism is welcome and even asked for, since the aim is the perfection of the tale. In accordance with the canon of evaluative criteria, the main target of critique are those parts of the narrative which are senseless or difficult to follow (“pas raisonnable, pas corrects”) and thus require some ‘editing’.

To sum up: whether ancient or new, funny or serious – the success of a tale performance relies essentially on the speaker’s ability to create and recreate an underlying template in accordance with the main canon of oral literary conventions. In other words, it is the art of *storytelling*, which is at the heart of quality assessment. Only by producing an insightful, coherent and carefully structured text and delivering it in a swift and lucid manner can a maximum of aesthetic satisfaction, cognitive and emotive, be achieved.

## **6. Rhetorical success and rhetorical failure: two examples**

To illustrate the findings, I shall conclude the investigation with the examples of two storytelling performances, one of which was highly successful, the other one heavily criticized.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> This kind of critical evaluation after an actual performance is an artificial situation. The Berba rarely sit down and assess the quality of a narrative in close detail. Should a discussion ensue, it tends to centre around referential rather than stylistic aspects.



#### 6.1. [*ipama*] – an acclaimed performance<sup>20</sup>

The first example is drawn from a recording of the popular tale [*ipama*] in the version by EI, 34, one of the most accomplished storytellers of Matéri. The tale was recorded in Matéri, 10 October 1992. A brief summary of the main plot<sup>21</sup>: The *bega* (the ‘big man’/ rich farmer) and his poor neighbour become fathers the same day. While the *bega* baptises his son *lawyoi*, meaning ‘the one with the big head’, his neighbour names his son *ipama*, signifying ‘the invulnerable’. The evil leper spurs the *bega* to punish the child for his presumptuous name and prove it wrong. They set a series of tasks, which are impossible to fulfil, which *ipama*, however, thanks to his wit, luck and exemplary conduct, manages to resolve. After it has become apparent that the child cannot be defeated that way, they try to kill him directly. Once more, it is *ipama*’s integrity and intellectual superiority which protects him against the ill machinations of the *bega* and the leper. Puzzled by this latest evidence of the child’s invulnerability, the *bega* questions him whether he was protected by a magic device. *ipama* denies it, yet the *bega* insists, so *ipama* finally admits the use of a magic substance. The *bega* asks *ipama* to prepare it for him. *ipama* agrees, but claims to lack the final ingredient, a leper’s head, that would have to serve as a firestone. The leper is forced to lie down and put his head in the fireplace. When the essence starts to boil, the leper, in his pain, tries to remove his head, but is instantly stabbed to death by the *bega*.

Bearing in mind the evaluative framework against which narratives and narrative skill are assessed, it becomes clear why the tale in the version by EI was a thorough success. One young man, whom I interviewed shortly after the event, summed up his appreciation with “Il a bien suivi le conte, comme il se doit.”

---

<sup>20</sup> The titles have been coined to facilitate the analysis. Usually, *swombi* have no titles.

<sup>21</sup> For a full version see appendix 1.

(Int. ND in 1992, II: 35-45) and another critic, an elderly lady, added: “Il a bien raconté ça, et ses propos sont clairs.” (Int. BK, in 1992: II: 35-45). In other words, it is the adherence to a well-known template (“comme il se doit”) and the lucid diction (“ses propos sont clairs”) which are valued and account for the success of the performance.

#### 6.1.1. Authenticity

*ipama* is one of the most renowned tales of Berba oral lore. Its popularity is not astonishing if we carefully consider the main features of the outline above. There is, first, the structure of the tale where two levels of action are interlocked in such a skilful way that a very high degree of entertainment is warranted through a repeated ‘tension – release’ effect. On a supra-level we find the main plot with ‘set-conflict (the evil leper spurs the *bega* to prove *ipama*’s name wrong) – plot (chain of episodes in which the leper and *bega* pursue their goal; climax with change of strategy from task towards a direct attack which mirrors the plotters’ increasing frustration) –turn or *pointe* (the leper’s death). Subordinate to these plots are the individual episodes which are modelled on the same pattern of ‘set-problem (task/ ruse) – plot – *pointe* (*ipama* turns the situation to his advantage). Secondly, there is the pleasure which arises out of a moral satisfaction, the just punishment of the jealous, ill-willed leper, and the victory of the weak over the strong. Given this refined composition which, properly delivered, allows for a maximum of cognitive and emotive satisfaction, it becomes comprehensible why the close adherence to the ‘authentic’ core, the tale’s characteristic template is both valued and expected. As a comparison with three other recordings of *ipama* by different storytellers shows, EI’s version constitutes indeed a most faithful reproduction of the tale, not only as regards the plot development, but also in terms of the completeness of the individual episodes:

<b>Version 1</b> <b>M. EI, aged 35</b>	<b>Version 2</b> <b>M. IT, 71</b>	<b>Version 3</b> <b>Mme YS, 63</b>	<b>Versions 4</b> <b>M. MT, 13</b>
Sequences <sup>22</sup>	Sequences	Sequences	Sequences
1.Set conflict (pre-sumptuous name, plot to kill the poor man's son)	Set conflict	Set conflict	Set conflict
2.Task: get bull to calve	Task: cook sauce without ingredients	Task: get seed to bear fruit in one day	Task: get bull to calve
3.Task: get seed to bear fruit in one day	Task: get bull to calve	Task: get bull to calve	Task: get seed to bear fruit in one day
4.Task: guard ring	Ruse: scald and burn him in hot beer	Task: cook sauce without ingredients	Ruse:spear him on return from <i>bega</i>
5.Ruse: scald and burn him in hot beer	Ruse: spear him on return from <i>bega</i>	Ruse: scald and burn him in hot beer	Trap: leads to leper's death
6.Ruse:spear him on return from <i>bega</i>	Task: guard poisoned talisman	Trap: leads to leper's death	----
7. Trap: leads to leper's death	----	<b>Conclusion:</b> If you are clever and God is with you, you will never die.	
<b>Conclusion:</b> Moral (see below)			

Table 1: Four versions of the tale [*ipama*]

Of all four versions, EI's is, with set-conflict, six episodes and conclusion, the most comprehensive one. Five of these episodes occur in the other versions as well. It is therefore reasonable to assume that they are not freely invented but indeed belong to the traditional core of the tale.<sup>23</sup> Equally, the arrangement of the episodes corresponds to the characteristic story line 'set-conflict – task –

<sup>22</sup> The term is adopted from Paulme who defines 'sequence' as "une certaine suite de propositions." (1972: 134).

<sup>23</sup> Only one episode – the task of cooking a sauce without ingredients (version 2, sequence 2 and version 3, sequence 4) – is lacking. It is difficult to tell whether it is a regional variant or part of the standard template which the story teller, however, has forgotten to include in his narrative. For a discussion of authenticity compare footnote 13.

ruse – trap’. (A negative example in this regard is version 2, where the climax, usually generated by the ‘task – ruse’ structure, is disturbed by an interjection of a new task-episode). The appreciation is hence for a speaker who satisfies the cognitive and emotive expectation of his audience by the perfect realisation of a popular and highly estimated piece of oral literature.

#### 6.1.2. Clarity

The criterion of ‘authenticity’ concerns the template, not the wording. As we have learned above, there is no such thing as a ‘word-by-word’ memorization. Instead, each speaker is free to choose his own wording as long as he keeps to the main story line. There are nonetheless qualitative differences. A good style is distinguished by clarity and straightforwardness (see above). As a scrutiny of our tale text reveals, EI meets both criteria and proves himself to be worthy of his reputation as an accomplished storyteller. The plot is clearly structured and easily comprehensible. EI anxiously avoids any form of redundancy, whether it be the repetition of sentences, the re-adoption of issues already dealt with or the indulgence in lengthy descriptions. Throughout the text, only ten adjectives are deployed. None of them is merely illustrative or embellishing. All of them contribute essentially to the logic of the plot. As regards the syntactical structure, verbal constructions and short paratactic phrases prevail. There is no hesitation, no stuttering. To illustrate this swift style of delivery, let us examine two of the episodes as to their narrative techniques. The first example is drawn from the fifth sequence, where the leper and the *bega* decide to do *ipama* in by scalding and drowning him in hot millet beer. To this end they dig a deep hole in the *bega*’s compound and deposit a large pot with boiling beer at the bottom. The hole is covered with a mat and *ipama* invited for a drink.

- 98    The *bega* sent a child (to *ipama*) and said: “Go and invite *ipama*  
to my house!”  
99    *ipama* arrived and wanted to sit down on the ground.

- 100 (The *bega*) said: "*ipama*, your place is not here."<sup>24</sup>  
101 Go and sit down over there!"  
102 *ipama* said: "My place (is) here!"  
103 (The *bega*) said: "No, your place is there!"  
104 *ipama* said: "We cannot argue the whole time!"  
105 He sat down and fell (into the hole).

What is remarkable about the sequence is the drive with which the plot unfolds. It derives from an extremely concise style in which no device is permitted that would not essentially contribute to the logic of the plot. One example is the way in which EI sets out the argument between the big man and *ipama*. Instead of staging an elaborate dialogue which would convey a feeling for the duration of the argument, he contents himself with a brief verbal exchange (101-04) in which the *principle* of such a debate is made apparent. While the sequence of 'address – reply' stands for the idea of a dispute (the clash of opposing views), the meta-comment "we cannot argue any longer" indicates its length. The utmost density of this narrative style contrasts sharply with other African storytelling traditions, where it is the opposite, the expansion of images, the expatiation on certain motifs, the use of repetition to suggest the flow of time, which are valued and expected (Scheub 1977: 122).

The second example is drawn from the last sequence in which *ipama* succeeds in manoeuvring his main adversary, the leper, into a situation which will inevitably entail his death. The past history: *ipama* and the *bega*'s son are sent off to visit a rich farmer in a neighbouring village. While the son of the *bega* is dressed like a commoner, *ipama* is given the *bega*'s shirt. During the journey the two exchange their clothes. On their return the leper spears the *bega*'s son whom he mistakes for *ipama*. Baffled by this renewed demonstration of

---

<sup>24</sup> In the class language *byali*, the grammatical form of personal pronouns is oriented towards the class of the respective noun, and thus allows for a clear identification of the point of reference. Due to the different grammatical structure of English, which is not as precise in this regard, I have opted for the replacement of the original pronoun with the respective noun (in brackets) in the translated version.

*ipama*'s invulnerability, the *bega* wants to know whether he uses a magic device:

- 150 He said: "This is truly something!  
151 Have you eaten *tibu*?"  
152 *ipama* said: "My father, I have not eaten anything."  
153 (The *bega*) said: "Without *tibu* the situation would not be like  
this!"  
154 *ipama* said: "I cannot argue any longer: I have eaten *tibu*."  
155 The *bega* said: "Make me eat from it!"  
156 *ipama* said: "I have got all the roots (i.e. ingredients) and there is  
(just) one that is missing."  
157 The *bega* said: "Which one is missing?"  
158 *ipama* said: "I have two stones for the fireplace.  
159 A leper's head must be the third."  
160 The *bega* said: "This is what you say, and there is the leper  
(living) here (in my house)!"  
161 The leper of whom you speak is here.  
162 The leper said: "I know other lepers who live here!"  
163 The *bega* said: "I cannot leave you out!"  
164 The leper said: "Allow me to place my head there (while I am  
still alive, instead of beheading me)."  
165 *ipama* said: "If he puts his head (there) and the potion boils and  
he removes (his head), the potion will spoil."  
166 The leper said: "I will not remove (my head)."  
167 After (*ipama*) had lit the fire, the time (passed), the potion  
boiled, the leper wanted to remove his head.  
168 *ipama* said: "*Tó!*, I have foreseen it."  
169 The *bega* stabbed the leper to death.

Also this sequence conveys an idea of the lucidity and economy of EI's narrative style. *ipama* tries to manoeuvre the leper into a trap which ultimately leads to his death. To stage this scene, EI deploys an interesting technique: in a lengthy dialogue between the *bega*, *ipama* and the leper, the trap is set so consistently, that there is no need to explain or describe the subsequent execution in detail. Two sentences suffice to sum up the leper's end. Thanks to this careful design, the storyteller has both avoided tedious repetition and maintained a maximum amount of verve and narrative tension (direct speech).

### 6.1.3. Moral and wit

So far the focus has been on the re-creative skills of the storyteller. Yet, the narrative also evinces something else: wit and creativity. I am referring here to the conclusion, which, as we have learned, constitutes the most flexible part of a tale. EI seizes the opportunity to deliver a complex statement which not only offers a clue to the meaning of the tale, but also proves his verbal and cultural competence:

- 170 This is why it is said: You cannot deprive a poor man of his  
possessions.  
171 Even if you are a *bega*, you must not deprive a poor man.  
172 And I (the narrator) add and say:  
173 *The one who pushes against the baobab will get the bones*  
(proverb).  
174 *The chicken that scratches the sand turns it round and round*  
(proverb).<sup>25</sup>

A 'good' conclusion stands out by the fact that it consistently follows from the text and enables an insightful and coherent review of the tale. All these criteria apply to the present case. There is, first of all, the notion of consistency. Compared to other recordings, the conclusion is unusually complex, with four propositions, two of them proverbs. They nonetheless allow for a perceptive and unified interpretation of the tale, which can be ascribed to two reasons: they are all consistently developed from the main text, and they all address the leitmotif of the story, the unequal relationship between the poor and the rich and the inappropriateness of the *bega*'s and leper's conduct. This leads us to the second quality of the conclusion: its moral dimension, and, following from it, its advisory value. Unlike other recordings, where the concluding remark consists of a mere summary (compare version three above), the speaker evaluates the plot and judges the main characters against the canon of governing norms and values. To him, the frustration of the evil schemes and the death of the leper are

---

<sup>25</sup> In a subsequent interview, EI explicated the meaning of the two proverbs. While the first proverb means that "a troublemaker will be treated like a dog and get nothing but the bones at festive occasions", the second warns "once a conflict has risen, it will entail further trouble." (Int. 13/05/96).

justified. They are the natural consequence of an attitude which is marked by jealousy and hypocrisy. With his conclusion he gives a clear warning to those who consider themselves superior and abuse a powerful position – the *bega* (170, 171) – and those who plot against others and deliberately jeopardize social peace – the leper (173, 174). The tale is elevated to a level where it serves as a parable of real life, affirming moral values and procuring guidelines for apposite conduct. That two of the conclusions occur in the most challenging code, that of proverbs, further proves the storyteller's skills.

## 6.2. 'The hyena and the dog' – a performance flaw

Having investigated the features of a *successful* storytelling performance, let us now turn to another narrative which was heavily *criticized* for the way it was both told and composed. The storyteller is TY (65†) from Kotari. It was recorded on 18 January 1992, in a storytelling session which had taken place at my request.<sup>26</sup> The evaluation took place two years later when I played the tape to a small group of people from the same village and asked to assess its quality.

- 1 We people, as we are alive, there was one thing which made the dog walk and walk until he arrived before the hyena who was cooking *tibu* which was just about to be finished.<sup>27</sup>
- 2 He asked: "What are you doing?"
- 3 The hyena said: "Wait and you will see."
- 4 The dog waited, the hyena cooked (the *tibu*) and said: "With this (*tibu*) you will lead a long and happy life!
- 5 Wherever you will pass, you will find some food deposited (for you), you will arrive and find something waiting for you.
- 6 It is deposited on the ground and you will see it [hesitation]....and it is deposited high above (in the air) and you will see it."

<sup>26</sup> For a full transcript see appendix 2.

<sup>27</sup> To translate a badly told story raises the methodological problem of how to demarcate a badly formulated part from a literal translation, which may sound clumsy or unsophisticated to the unpractised ear, but which is perfectly acceptable from the indigenous point of view. In the present case I have opted for a semi-polished version, which means that those parts are added in brackets which are required in the English translation to convey a sense of the same swiftness, logic – or incoherence and lack of clarity – which they display in the vernacular. Remarks in square brackets comment on non-linguistic narrative behaviour.



- 7 The dog said: "I want (to have it)."
- 8 The hyena cooked (it for some time) to finish it off.
- 9 He approached the dog and passed some of the *tibu* over its forehead.
- 10 He said: "Dog, I have given you *tibu*.
- 11 From now on you will never be lacking anything."
- 12 Go and call all your brothers to come together at the *bega's* hamlet in order to report (what has happened) [lengthy hesitation, correction]...go and tell the *bega*, (he should) tell (them) they should come.
- 13 The *bega* shall convene them at my house so that I can prepare some *tibu* for you.
- 14 If you (pl.), the puppy (sg.), trace it (over your forehead), you will never miss out on anything from now on."
- 15 The dog went straight back to report (it to) the *bega*.
- 16 The *bega* beat the drum straight away.
- 17 All the dogs came together.
- 18 The *bega* said: "I have called you for a good reason.
- 19 Your friend here has been at somebody's house and has observed how *tibu* (sg.) has been prepared for him, some *tibu* (pl.).
- 20 The *tibu* is so powerful that, wherever you are, you will not miss out on anything."
- 21 The dogs said: "Ywau! If someone had prepared (some *tibu*) and we knew it and had already seen things we would not dispel anything." [narrator clears his throat, hesitates, lengthy pause]
- 22 There was an old bitch.
- 23 She came.
- 24 When she arrived, she said: "I heard the drum and my heart was already excited."
- 25 The *bega* said: "Ywau! He (the dog) has gathered his men (relatives).
- 26 They want to go to the hyena to eat *tibu*.
- 27 He has gone (to the hyena) and eaten (from the *tibu*), and has come back to call his brothers, the dogs, to return to the hyena."
- 28 The old dog said: "Ywau! You have a black heart (i.e. you are simple minded).
- 29 If you get up and visit him, he will drive you in his house and lock you up in his house.
- 30 You will see that no dog will return, not a single dog."
- 31 The *bega* said: "Well, I could not do it.
- 32 (Here), take a bag for the *tibu*.
- 33 When you come back give it back (to me)."

- 34 (The dog) took the bag reserved for the *tibu* to hand it back (to the *bega*) at his return.
- 35 The hyena said: "Come in!"
- 36 The dog said: "I will not move, I will not enter!"
- 37 The hyena said: "What is the matter?"
- 38 You, you want to bring back *tibu* and you refuse to give me (the bag)."
- 39 "When I (i.e. the dog) had gone back and reported (what had happened), the *bega* beat the drum and regrouped the people.
- 40 There was an old woman who interrupted his speech.
- 41 She said, if they went (to your place) you would eat them all."
- 42 The hyena said: "Come in! You, who have come on your own, how would I eat you?"
- 43 Come in!"
- 44 The dog said: "I will not enter!"
- 45 I will not enter."
- 46 The dog peeped in and threw the bag to the ground and fled, short-legged as he was.
- 47 The hyena said: "I will pursue him!"
- 48 He said: "I will go straight away, me and you!"
- 49 When they arrived at the house, he beat up the dog, who fell to the ground and smashed his mouth.
- 50 *Amongst the dogs, those with four traits do not bring forth many pups.*
- 51 *If a pup shall resemble its race, the dog must whelp several times.*

Bearing in mind the canon of evaluative criteria, it comes as no surprise that this performance was not greatly favoured by the audience. Even at the very beginning the tale was sharply criticized. As it was pointed out to me, a good storyteller would never commence his performance in such a brusque manner. He would at least introduce his narration with the standard formula "*swomba swomba*" if not express his appreciation for the preceding performance ("You have well spoken. Now I am going to tell you about..." or "Thank you for your performance..."). The principal reproach, however, concerns the incoherence and redundancy which results in a lack of both insight and tension. The narrative starts off fairly confusingly, with a mention of mankind and audience, before the main character, the dog, is introduced. Uncertainty also marks sentence (12),

where the storyteller first pauses before he corrects himself after having noticed that his proposition does not logically follow from the preceding paragraph. (It is the *bega*'s task to call together the villagers by beating the drum. Other than that there is no reason to go to the *bega*). Another criticism targets the numerous repetitions which occur throughout the text and impede a swift plot development. In particular sentence (6) and (27) were picked upon for being superfluous and 'not interesting' ('*də pə narī*'). The greatest disapproval, however, was for failing at the two most crucial points of a tale: *pointe* and conclusion. In sentence (40-41) the *pointe* is cut short by the dog's verbatim repetition of the old bitch's warning before the hyena. Instead of building up any tension, TY leads straight over to the persecution of the dog by the hyena without having introduced an interesting turn in the plot (e.g. the dog thinks up a ruse to prove the bitch's forecast wrong). As to the conclusion, the appraisal is equally negative: the inference bears no relation whatsoever with the main text. The speaker has gambled away the chance to enable an insightful review of the tale, to orient the listener towards its main message and offer a witty conclusion, an etiological explanation or valuable advice.

The example readily illustrates the rhetorical risk inherent in the relation of a new tale. A tale which has never been tested before may turn out to have considerable shortcomings – inconsistencies, long-drawn-out passages – which will confuse and annoy the audience. If, moreover, it is delivered in an unskilled fashion, in which the speaker aggravates conceptual fallacies instead of making them good, the performance risks being a complete failure. The risk is significantly lower in the case of popular tales, whose structure has been tested in many performances, and where it only depends on the skill of the storyteller to re-create the tale in an appropriate manner. On the other hand, if a new tale is both well performed and well composed it will be warranted the greatest success, since the emotive and cognitive satisfaction is reinforced by a heightened tension and curiosity.

## 7. Acquisition of storytelling competence

Having investigated the notion of quality in the tradition of storytelling, the question remains regarding the acquisition of narrative competence and the qualities a speaker has to dispose of in order to become an accomplished storyteller.

AC: "Quelles sont les qualités d'un bon conteur? Être intelligent?  
Avoir parlé avec des vieux?"

IT: "Il y a certains qui écoutent le langage des vieux, et après eux  
aussi, ils peuvent raconter, s'ils sont des enfants intelligents."

DN: "Celui qui les respecte et reste souvent chez eux, il  
comprend le langage [...] Les gens parlent un langage clair." (Int.  
14/02/92)

There is, first, a good memory. A speaker has to build up a large stock of tale templates, plots and images which he can then re-create or put together in new compositions when the situation arises. The main way to do so is by listening to other tale performances and memorizing the main story lines ("ils écoutent...et après eux aussi, ils peuvent raconter"). The second requirement is intelligence. It is indispensable for the acquisition of true competence in the Berba tradition of tales: the art of *storytelling* ("le langage"), i.e. of shaping and relating any text, whether ancient or newly invented, in an adequate and appealing way. Again, the main training happens in an informal way by imitating the way of speaking of expert storytellers ("les gens parlent un langage clair"). Last, but not least, a speaker must display interest in the storytelling tradition. Otherwise, he will neither be willing to memorize a tale nor put any effort into acquiring a lucid diction. The main occasions for obtaining and practising narrative skills are, most obviously, the innumerable storytelling sessions which take place in the storytelling season.<sup>28</sup> During this time, one can frequently hear children telling each other bedtime stories – recreated versions of what they have been listening to before. An interesting observation in this regard is the practice of

---

<sup>28</sup> The practice of the audience repeating every sentence uttered by the storyteller (an integral part of a storytelling performance, see above) is certainly helpful in this regard.

correcting and helping each other out by adding lacking sequences or taking over when the speaker has forgotten the continuation of the plot. In such an informal way, children may refine their narrative skills, which they will have to prove later on in a more challenging environment, when competing with adults and expert storytellers in large scale events. As 15 *swombi* told by eight children aged between 5 and 13 years reveal, storytelling competence is acquired at a very young age. While the 5 to 8 year olds were already able to recreate perfectly consistent, though somewhat abbreviated versions of popular tales, the *swombi* related by a 12 year old girl and a 13 year old boy complied, by any standard, with the ideal of a Berba narrative. Another training ground is the bush school, mentioned at the beginning. The teaching and memorizing of *kundebi* constitutes an important part of the education in the initiation camp. On their final day, the initiates have to undergo an oral exam in which they have to produce *kundebi* on request.

## Chapter V: *kwankyamə* and the art of proverb speaking

The second grand tradition in Berba oral literature is called *kwankyamə* meaning proverb or proverb tradition.<sup>1</sup> The term not only refers to the universally known proverb, including metaphorical sayings and abstract maxims, but also compound extended metaphors, parables and illustrative tales. They are considered an integral part of language use and are deployed mainly on two occasions. On the one hand, they occur as rhetorical devices in a conversational speech context, whether under playful (teasing, flirting) or more 'serious' conditions (conflict management, political debate). On the other hand, they may also become the nucleus of discourse and be practiced as an 'art for art's sake' when adults engage in proverb contests and compete in wit and analogic competence.

The aim of the present chapter is to approach the indigenous conception of quality and skill in the tradition of proverb speaking. Before we turn to an analysis of the emic evaluative discourse, however, we have to take a closer look at the genre itself. This is for several reasons: firstly, I intend to use the terms *kwankyamə* and proverb interchangeably. Not only are Western proverbs readily acknowledged as *kwankyamə*, but French speaking Berba do not hesitate to translate *kwankyamə* with '*proverbe*'. Yet, as the analysis will reveal, a cross-cultural acceptance of the same verbal material does not necessarily mean conceptual congruity. It is therefore imperative to introduce the analysis with a definition of the subject of investigation itself.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, as

---

<sup>1</sup> One also finds *kwankyaməm* and *kwankyama*. There is no plural.

<sup>2</sup> There has been a prolonged and often controversial debate centred around the notion of genre. Unlike other oral literary traditions, such as the song or storytelling tradition, it seems particularly difficult to agree on a unifying concept which is culturally specific and cross-culturally applicable at the same time. The difficulty in reaching a satisfying answer must partly be attributed to the different theoretical assumptions on which the various studies are built, most notably the divide between textual and contextual approaches. It is not my intention to engage in the quest for a cross-culturally applicable definition. Quite to the contrary, the interest is very much in the genre's cultural *particularity*, since it is the generic framework which provides the background for quality assessment and the notion of artful speech.

we will see later on, the main measure of quality in proverb use is the aptness and skill with which a speaker exploits the expressive potential of the genre. To fully comprehend the 'art' in proverb speaking, it is thus indispensable to have a clear idea of the genre, its inherent properties and operating mechanism. Finally, there is the issue of creativity. It is part of a speaker's skill to invent new sayings when no suitable proverb is at hand. Also in this regard, an acquaintance with the conceptual framework of a *kwankyamə* is needed, for it provides the pattern on which new *kwankyamə* are modelled.

## 1. *kwankyamə* : genre matters

### 1.1. Analogy

In response to the basic question "What is *kwankyamə*?" critics offer various explanations, which can be distinguished in two groups:

BK: "dire quelque chose que certains ne peuvent pas comprendre." (Int. 08/06/95)

ND: "c'est si tu entoures, enfermes quelque chose" (1995, I: 99)

DN: "c'est comme une devinette" (1995, II: 100)

TY: "quand on entend quelque chose pour la première fois et elle semble mystérieuse." (Int. 18/06/95)

IT: "comparer des choses" (Int. 12/05/95)

YE: "c'est un exemple" (*də nwanəm nīngə* = it is like) (Int. 20/03/96)

While the first four statements highlight the riddle character of a *kwankyamə*, the last two remarks emphasize its potential to 'compare' things. The concept which reconciles these disparate qualities is the concept of 'analogy'. An analogy is the similitude of relations. Seitel has been one of the first to highlight this aspect. In his investigation of proverb use among the Haya, he establishes a heuristic model in which he distinguishes between three levels, namely "the one inherent in the text of the proverb itself taken literally; the one to which the proverb is intended to be applied; and the one in which the proverb is in fact

being said. They are termed, respectively, the *proverb situation*, the *context situation*, and the *interaction situation*". The assertion is that "the relationship that obtains between the things in the *proverb situation* is analogous to the relationship between the entities in the *context situation*." (1977: 76-77, emphasis by the author). In verbal interaction the use of an analogy means a complex process of en-coding and de-coding, whereby two different perspectives, that of the speaker and the recipient, must be distinguished: from the speaker's point of view, the process can be described as the recognition of properties and relations between them in the context situation for which an analogous proverb situation must be identified. The recipient, in turn, has to conduct the reverse process and discern certain properties, an abstract or paradigmatic principle in the proverb situation which he must then correlate with analogous features in the context situation (provided the proverb is not an abstract maxim already). Bearing in mind this theoretical model, the Berba statements become clear: two situations, the proverb and the context situation, are related or compared to each other ("comparer", "exemple"). The full impact of the literal level remains obscure ("mystérieuse", "devinette"), unless the listener searches for analogous patterns in the context situation and decodes the intended meaning.

Yet an 'analogic character' is not the only constitutive element of a *kwankyamə*. In defining what to him constitutes a *kwankyamə* a young Berba notes:

TY: "C'est ça qui est riche (*subi*). Et si tu restes et que tu causes, ce sont des choses qui sont réelles (*magərə*)." (Int. 04/06/95)

According to TY, a *kwankyamə* must be 'rich' on the literal and 'real' on the applied level, once the abstract principle is deduced and possible relations between the proverb and context situation are examined ("tu restes et tu causes"). What exactly does he mean? And what follows for the constituent elements of a *kwankyamə*?



To answer these questions, I will draw on an experimental group discussion which I had organized in order to explore the generic nature of *kwankyamə*. In the course of the event, eight Berba critics – two women and six men aged between 20 and 65 years – were asked to assess the nature of 23 sentences and to explain their choice.<sup>3</sup> The corpus consisted of a mixture of Biali, French and German proverbs, some of them cited in their original, some of them in their inverted sense (e.g. “The late (instead of the early) bird catches the worm.”). The idea was to see whether or not and on what ground sayings were accepted or dismissed as *kwankyamə*, and so learn about the constituting elements of the genre.<sup>4</sup> Let us begin with one of the most complex and insightful comments, given in response to the saying:

AC: “Avoir un gros poulet au plafond de ta case vaut mieux qu’avoir un petit poussin dans tes mains.”

YT: “C’est un proverbe, mais il est renversé.”

AC: “Pourquoi?”

YT: “S’il disait “avoir un petit poulet dans ta main vaut mieux qu’avoir un gros poulet sur le toit!” – dans ce cas on peut avoir des explications. L’exemple de la récolte: Si tu as des champs loin de ton village et si, pendant les récoltes, tu arrives à apporter au moins trois bassins chez toi et qu’il reste beaucoup de bassins au champ, la nourriture qui t’appartient est celle qui est dans ta maison. Le reste ne t’appartient pas d’autant plus qu’elle peut-être détruite par des animaux dévastateurs ou par les voleurs.”  
(GD 20/03/96)

The saying is inspired by the German: “A sparrow in the hand is worth more than a pigeon on the roof”, meaning “to have something small which you command is better than to rely on something big which is beyond your

---

<sup>3</sup> The group discussion took place on 25 March 1996 in Kotari.

<sup>4</sup> To avoid a learning effect, the sayings were presented to the audience in no particular order.

control”.<sup>5</sup> In its inverted version – the version presented to the group – it advises the opposite, namely: “Rely on something big, but uncontrollable and do not content yourself with something small which you fully command.”. For the process of genre assessment it is revealing to look at the way in which YT explains his judgement. Obviously, he had never heard the sentence before. Nonetheless, it passes as a “*kwankyamə*, mais renversé.” Why? What are the *primary* generic criteria? The elaborate evaluation by YT provides the answer. Having abstracted a general principle from the metaphor, he dismisses the saying on the grounds of empirical fallacy. To him, it makes no sense to count on values beyond reach and neglect those which are at hand. Yet his judgement does not end there. As it becomes clear from the following part, he recognizes the saying’s potential to make a ‘true’ i.e. insightful and valid statement, if just the logical relations were inverted. The test-case is the successful application of the proverb to a hypothetical context situation, which, at the same time, provides empirical evidence of the truth on the literal level.

In concluding from the emic evaluation, we can refine the genre definition: apart from its analogic character, a *kwankyamə* is characterized by its potential for a true and meaningful application due to the verity on its literal level. In the words of TY “c’est ça qui est riche (i.e. potential for meaning). Et si tu restes et causes, ce sont les choses qui sont réelles (i.e. meaning on the applied level)”. It is this potential for valuable use in interaction which accounts for the high esteem of the genre. The measure for ‘meaning’, in turn, is moral, cultural and empirical truth, and differs according to the evaluative disposition of the judging individual.<sup>6</sup>

Let us complement and substantiate these findings with further examples from the group discussion. We will begin with the notion of truth on the literal level.

---

<sup>5</sup> Compare the English “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”.

<sup>6</sup> The notion of the ‘truth’ of the applied meaning may refer to the verity contained in the message, or to the result which it has engendered.

1.1.1. Determining the truth value (*magari*) on the literal level – the criterion of explicability/ verifiability

1.1.1.1. Truth of imagery

AC: “C’est la vérité qui sort de la bouche de l’enfant.”

GD: “C’est vrai (*magarə*)! C’est un proverbe, parce que l’enfant dit ce qu’il voit, ce qu’il entend...”

The saying is a literal translation of a popular German proverb. It is classified as a *kwankyamə* on the ground that its imagery was ‘true’ since ‘explicable’, i.e. empirically verifiable (“c’est vrai. C’est un proverbe, parce que...”). There is little need to provide a hypothetical context situation to prove its potential for meaningful application, since the proverb situation corresponds to the context situation it is applicable to (standard context of use: a child innocently discloses family secrets to a stranger).

1.1.1.2. Truth of the abstract or paradigmatic principle

As the following example shows, truth on the literal level is not only assessed in terms of the empirical evidence of the proverb situation, but also of the verifiability of the paradigmatic principle contained in the imagery:

AC: “Paris ne s’est pas construite en un seul jour.”

NT: “C’est quoi – Paris?”

AC: “C’est le village le plus grand du pays des blancs.”

KY: “Si quelqu’un est vieux, gros ou élancé, il ne faut croire qu’on l’a mis au monde pareillement.”

AC: “Si quelqu’un d’ici disait: “Paris ne s’est pas construite en un jour.”, dans une réunion, par exemple, est-ce que vous le considéreriez comme un proverbe? Parce que ce n’est pas tout le monde qui connaît Paris?”

NT: "Oui, c'est un proverbe! On ne suit pas ce qu'il dit. On n'attache pas grande importance aux paroles. On sait qu'il veut dire: "Si tu veux faire quelque chose de bien, il faut plusieurs jours pour aboutir à cette chose." On laisse seulement 'Paris' et on le remplace par 'faire quelque chose du bien.' "

As NT sets out, the demand for empirical verifiability of the imagery can be secondary to the requirement of a meaningful statement. A precondition for acceptance is the recognition of the properties of the terms which allow for the abstraction of an insightful statement ("On n'attache pas grande importance aux paroles", "On laisse...et on remplace"). It is therefore sufficient to detect certain properties of an otherwise unknown term. The sense which the proverb produces is reason enough to trust the speaker's words (source of evidence: hearsay/ eye witness) and to qualify the saying as a *kwankyamə*, even if Paris has neither been seen nor heard of by the people before. It is this logic which explains the ready acceptance of those proverbs which have been coined in bygone days and feature elements that are unknown to the Berba of today (lion, elephant etc.). What matters is the acquaintance with their main properties, testified by and passed down over generations, since it is they that constitute 'meaning' and allow for an insightful proverb use.

Two conclusions follow from the examples: a) what has been suggested in the first sequence (TY) is now affirmed: one determinant factor in the process of genre assessment is the truth value on the literal level, including imagery and paradigmatic principle, b) the test-case and criterion to determine the truth value is the explicability of the proverb situation, i.e. its verification through moral, cultural and empirical evidence. Bearing in mind the importance of 'truth/ meaning on the literal level', we can understand the negative evaluation of the following *kwankyamə*:

AC: "Quel que soit l'homme, il n'enfantera jamais une gourde."

NK: "Quel que soit l'homme, il n'enfantera pas une gourde? Ici, on ne peut même pas rapprocher le mariage entre le blanc et le noir...A la rigueur, je peux accepter l'explication, mais sachez

que ce proverbe n'existe pas. Par ailleurs il pouvait dire: "Quel soit la nature de l'homme, il n'enfantera jamais un animal."

AC: "Est-ce que c'est un proverbe ou pas?"

NK: "Moi, je dirai que ce n'est pas un proverbe. Même si on nous donnait le sens, on verrait que le sens ne correspond pas au proverbe. Par conséquent, c'est un proverbe inutile."

AC: "Si celui qui a utilisé le proverbe était là pour vous donner l'explication, est-ce que vous l'accepteriez?"

ND: "Peut-être s'il était là, il donnerait peut-être l'explication: Un homme parfait et sérieux n'enfantera pas un voleur."

NK: "Oui, mais il ne devait pas dire ce qu'il a dit. Ça choque. On peut dire: L'homme n'enfanterait pas une bête sauvage. Mais pour la bouteille je dis 'non'."

NK and YK: "Son proverbe n'est pas intéressant (*de pə nari*)."

We are here dealing with a statement, which in terms of its paradigmatic principle would have been perfectly acceptable, yet is already rejected on its literal level. The abstraction of the imagery translates into the dictum: 'whatever the qualities of a being, there are natural limits to what it can effect'. And indeed, ND even proposes a context situation, it could usefully be applied to ("un homme sérieux n'enfanterait pas un voleur."). NK, however, takes a different stance. To him, the saying is unacceptable since its imagery was senseless, morally inappropriate (and presumably aesthetically appalling). It is 'un-true' in the sense that there is no connection whatsoever between man and bottle, no reality in which these terms could be related in a meaningful way, not even as a pair of opposites. An alternative would be to associate man and animal, both living creatures, and to allow for an insightful opposition between 'wild' and 'civilized'. In its present form, however, it is inapplicable ("le sens ne correspond pas") and therefore useless ("inutile"). It forfeits its right to exist and to be remembered ("le proverbe n'existe pas"). Also the following saying is rejected:

AC: "Si tu ne sèmes pas, tu récolteras beaucoup."

NT: “Ce n’est pas un proverbe. Ça doit être un paresseux!”

To the critic, neither the proverb situation nor the advice contained in it – “don’t make any effort and you will have great success.” – makes any sense. As a farmer, he knows that at least some effort is required in order to obtain a good harvest. It is this lack of empirical evidence of the truth on the literal level which explains the dismissal of the saying as *kwankyamə*. To the critic the statement is nothing but a ready proof of the speaker’s laziness.

#### 1.1.2. Determining the potential for meaningful use – the criterion of applicability

Having dealt with evaluations in which the generic nature of a saying is determined on the basis of the truth/ meaning on the literal level, we will now turn to the second way of assessing and identifying a *kwankyamə*, which is to evince its potential for meaningful use by (successfully) applying it to a hypothetical context situation. A first demonstration of this technique has already been provided in the initial sequence (YT).

AC: “Mets tes œufs dans le même panier!”<sup>7</sup>

YT: “Oui, quand tu arrives à prodiguer des conseils à tous tes enfants, en pratique ils sont considérés comme des enfants vivants dans un seul panier.”

AC: “Ne pensez-vous pas que les œufs se cassent si on les regroupe dans un seul panier?”

YT: “Dans ce cas précis c’est une comparaison. Ce ne sont pas les vrais œufs, qui sont considérés ici. Les œufs ici sont donnés en les comparant aux enfants bien éduqués. Et quand on prend les œufs, ce sont des choses très simples qui n’ont pas d’histoire.”<sup>8</sup>

Lieber, in his essay on analogic ambiguity in proverb use, notes that “almost any nontrivial pair of terms that one can think of can be seen to have more than one

---

<sup>7</sup> The saying is the inverted version of the French “Ne mets pas tous tes œufs dans le même panier.”

<sup>8</sup> Lit. *nin yo yoge*: no history of lies, no scandals.

relationship between them. This is so because the nouns, verbs, and adjectives we use in natural speech have several significata and are used in more than one context, often in more than one level of context.” (1984: 426). It is this semantic complexity which explains why the same saying may be viewed and interpreted in different ways. In the present example, it is the various properties of the term ‘egg’ which account for the differences in interpretation and assessment of the saying. In the French original version “Ne mets pas tous tes œufs dans le même panier” the property of fragility is highlighted. It follows that it is dangerous to put all eggs (‘fragile things’) at risk at the same time. Yet, the critics have to deal with the proverb in its reversed form and hence pick on different properties in the attempt to understand the saying. The guiding idea in this search is the quest for sense, i.e. the meaningful application of the proverb. The question is: “Why should it be good to regroup things of the same kind?” Answer: “Because they can benefit from the same thing.” In examining the inherent properties of the individual terms, the participants opt for the property of ‘youth’, ‘innocence’ and ‘malleability’ (“les choses simples, qui n’ont pas encore d’histoire”). Again, the test case to validate the interpretation (and with it prove the generic character of the saying) is the successful application to a hypothetical context situation where the proverb makes sense and conveys an acceptable truth or valuable advice. While eggs are correlated with children who can still be educated, the act of putting them together in the same basket translates into “spreading the same good advice over them” (“prodiguer des conseils à tous”).

In conclusion, it can be said that the understanding and acceptance of an unknown saying is determined by the notion of applicability (provided it has not yet been rejected on the literal level). In a process of trial and error, different interpretations are probed until an insightful match with a hypothetical context situation is identified. What is remarkable is the ease with which critics playfully examine possible combinations of properties and logical relationships. This has its explanation in the indigenous conception of a *kwankyame* which centres around the notion of analogy and habituates the listener to reading the individual terms on two levels, a literal and a class level. Thus, as YT forbearingly notes

(in addressing the unlearned researcher), terms should not be taken too literally, since “dans ce cas précis c’est une comparaison”; it was the sense of the applied meaning which would direct the selection of the properties and the interpretation of the literal level.

The quest for applicability is also the leitmotif in the following evaluation made by an indigenous critic regarding a new saying (invented by the researcher):

AC: “On boit l’eau quand elle est très, très chaude.”

NT: “Ce n’est pas un proverbe. *Mais on peut l’accepter dans le cadre de la bagarre*. Quand deux hommes se querellent, il y a un moment précis où ils se tiennent à la gorge [...] Quand tu es jeune et tu ne fais rien, c’est dans ta vieillesse que tu feras quelque chose?”

In a spontaneous reaction, the speaker dismisses the phrase on the grounds that the advice it would carry – “undertake an action when it is likely to be harmful” – is too absurd, lacking any empirical or moral truth, as to be acceptable. However, he goes on, there was one single context which could allow for the meaningful application of the saying. It is this the peak moment in a fight between two young men, who, in the heat of their youth, do not care about the danger they are in and the harm they are doing to each other. In its ‘extremity’ the image of the two young men would represent a perfect analogy to the ‘extreme’ element in the proverb situation and hence justify the label *kwankyamə*. What is noteworthy is the fact that not only the genre is determined by the context situation, but also its function: what is rejected as advice can well be accepted as a comment when describing or ‘naming’ a situation.<sup>9</sup>

So far, the investigation has revolved around examples in which unknown sayings were examined. This method has proved to be particularly useful in exploring generic qualities. Yet what about popular, well known proverbs?

---

<sup>9</sup> “Proverbs are strategies for dealing with situations. Insofar as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them.” (Burke 1956: 256).



AC: "Le sable du pied est le même que celui des fesses."

NK: "C'est un proverbe, mais ce n'est pas comme ça. On dit: "On ne peut pas comparer le sable du pied à celui des fesses: celui du pied vaut mieux." Toi, tu viens de très loin. Toi, tu as vu et appris des choses ici. Ceux, qui ne sont pas venus ici, n'auront pas des mêmes informations que toi."

The saying is the inverted version of the popular Berba *kwankyamə* "Le sable du pied n'est pas le même que celui des fesses." As the first part of the statement shows, the critic leaves no doubt that the saying is unacceptable in its present form. To him, it seems like a 'mistake' to have omitted the negation in the well-known proverb and hastens to rectify it by citing the original *kwankyamə*. He does not even consider the possibility of a deliberate and perhaps insightful alteration of meaning. This emphatic objection, however, cannot simply be put down to a traditionalist attitude. As the second part of the statement reveals, it is not 'authenticity' or 'historical identity' *per se*, but its potential for meaningful use approved over time which leads the speaker to cling to the well-known proverb and dismiss its altered version. Its value is readily evinced by the insightful application of the abstract principle to the interaction situation ("it is better to actively search for something new ("sable du pied") than to stay at home and remain ignorant ("sable des fesses)"). We can therefore conclude that what has been inferred from the evaluation of new sayings also applies to the body of popular proverbs: the constituting elements of a *kwankyamə* are its analogic character and its potential for meaningful use (criterion: applicability) which originates from the truth value on the literal level (criterion: explicability/ verifiability). The manifestations of meaningful use thereby compound the rhetorical forms of 'comment' and 'advice'.<sup>10</sup> In comparing the genre conception with common proverb definitions, fundamental differences can be noted. While the latter tend to centre around thematic or

<sup>10</sup> The findings differ from other proverb traditions, where antiquity figures as a primary genre criterion, even outweighing aspects of logic and truth. Yankah, for example, notes with regard to the Akan that "regardless of the logic and fallacy in a proverb (...) it has evocative and allusive significance, and is perceived as a verity that cannot be questioned" (1989a: 40).

formal-structural aspects or highlight the 'antiquity' of proverbs, none of these elements feature in the Berba definition. Neither style and the quality of imagery, nor shortness and conciseness, nor the notion of a collective and ancestral wisdom – the constituents most frequently cited in defining a proverb – have been mentioned once by Berba critics. Instead it is the genre's potential for meaningful use, its role and function in verbal interaction which is to the fore, manifest in the two principal criteria, analogy and applicability, both of which require a speech context (whether imagined or real) which the genre is used in and applied to. As we will see later on, any other aspect – style, form, even age – is subordinate to the idea of contextual usage.<sup>11</sup> It explains why short-form sayings, proverbs in the Western sense of the word, figure under the same ethnic label as parables, wellerisms, extended metaphors etc.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Creativity

Before turning to the question of quality assessment, one aspect deserves some more consideration, which has been taken for granted so far, yet is not self-evident when compared to other proverb traditions. I am referring here to the notion of creativity. As it has been stated above, 'age' is not a primary generic criterion. Equally, the preparedness and ability to decode unknown proverbs, clearly evident in the examples cited above, suggests a general acceptance if not high estimation of novelty and creativity in proverb speaking.

So far, creativity is an aspect which has rarely been dealt with in proverb scholarship. This can be attributed to two factors: firstly, many investigations start from the notion of a proverb as the embodiment of a people's wisdom,

---

<sup>11</sup> The findings corroborate a trend in proverb scholarship, in which the genre is no longer defined in terms of formal-structural commonalties but in terms of its context of use (Arewa 1970; Christensen 1958; Messenger 1959; Seitel 1973; Yankah 1989a). This conceptual change is less due to new ethnographic evidence than to a paradigmatic shift in folklore studies, commonly described as a move from text to context.

<sup>12</sup> Although the Berba themselves make no distinction in terms of formal-structural features, I will adopt a useful classification suggested by Yankah, who distinguishes between two main proverb types "Type 1, the *attributive* proverb type refers to the shorter, crisp and oft 'quoted' forms often ascribed to authoritative, impersonal or personal sources. Type 2, the *non-attributive* proverb type refers to longer forms, animal tale, parable, story, etc. that are often not prefaced with an authorship formula." (1989a: 89).

created in ancient times and passed down from one generation to the next. Whiting, for example, defines a proverb as “a short saying of a philosophical nature, of great antiquity, the product of masses rather than of the classes.” (1933: 44). In this view, rhetorical power is thought to derive from quoting from collective wisdom (Okezie 1977). Given such emphasis on ancestral legacy and common authorship, there is no point in exploring or even considering the notion of a creative genius of an individual proverb speaker. Secondly, there are conceptual biases in the culture itself. Speakers are reported to be hesitant or unwilling to admit the existence of new compositions, arguing with evidence from pre-proverb formula such as “the elders say...” or “I apologize for using a wise saying of the ancestors, but...” that would give clear indications as to age and provenance of the saying. Even if people recognize the coinage of new proverbs, there may still be a conceptual problem, as Yankah remarks in respect to the Akan proverb tradition: “The paradox is that while a completely new ‘proverb’ cannot be called a proverb, because it may not have sunk into popular tradition, a proverb that has been widely acclaimed can no longer be considered new.” (Yankah 1989a: 200). Nonetheless, there is clear evidence for the coinage of new proverbs, as he demonstrates most impressively with the example of a proverb custodian, an elder who guards and cites new sayings.<sup>13</sup> Overall, however, creativity seems to rest with the modification of known proverbs and the ‘emerging quality in performance’ (the creative use of verbal material in changing circumstances) rather than the coinage of new proverbs (cf. Yankah 1989a: 199-200).<sup>14</sup> The Berba stand out among African cultures, since creativity, understood as the coinage of new proverbs, is readily admitted and acknowledged as an integral part of the proverb tradition<sup>15</sup>:

DN: “Quand on les met au monde,[...] certains, en grandissant,  
ne veulent pas manger ce que les vieux leur donnent. Un jour tu

<sup>13</sup> Another source of evidence is the vocabulary of some proverb collections which reflect historical changes and help to locate the coinage in the course of time (see, for example, Nwachukwu-Agbada (1988)).

<sup>14</sup> For an insightful discussion of creativity in proverb speaking see Yankah (1986b).

<sup>15</sup> Another exception seem to be the Gbaya of Central Africa. According to Roulon (1983: 44-46) Gbaya admit and appreciate the coinage of new sayings provided they fit with the speech context. The example of an improvised proverb illustrates this fact.

constates que ça ne te va pas et tu vas le laisser et c'est au fur et à mesure que les choses changent. Concernant les proverbes, c'est la même chose. Les vieux peuvent inventer (des proverbes), comme le peuvent les petits." (Int. 18/01/92)

In the eyes of DN, the composition of *kwankyamə* is an entirely natural process, which occurs as the adaptation of language to changing historical circumstances ("tu constates que ça ne te va pas et tu vas laisser et c'est suite en suite que les choses changent"). As the critic underlines, creativity is not the privilege of a certain age group or people of a high social status, but is a conversational technique which is open to any speaker. ("Les vieux peuvent inventer comme le peuvent les petits").<sup>16</sup> This is not to deny either the existence or the significance of a large body of popular proverbs (mainly attributive proverbs), which are ascribed to 'the elders' and highly valued for their expressive value. Yet age is not a *primary* constituent, and (in principle) there is no difference between new and ancient or popular *kwankyamə*, provided they comply with the principal generic criteria.

What can be said about the creative process? Apart from the basic requirements, is there a pattern on which new *kwankyamə* are modelled? And are there any restrictions? Most obviously, as with any other art form, the main source of inspiration is the body of popular proverbs:

DN: "Quand (les gens) inventent, leurs proverbes ressemblent aux anciens proverbes. Ça veut dire, ils tirent des éléments des anciens proverbes." (Int. 26/05/95)

Ancient or popular *kwankyamə* (preferably attributive proverbs) provide the templates for new sayings, not only in terms of formal-structural elements, logical relations (paradigmatic principle), but also regarding imagery (properties of certain terms).<sup>17</sup> Drawing on these blueprints has several advantages: a) It

<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, elders have an advantage due to their life long experience with allusive language.

<sup>17</sup> Compare Herzog and Blooah's remark on the creative process in the Jabo proverb tradition: "As different shades of meaning in a proverb become accentuated, variants

increases the recognition value of the saying as a *kwankyamə*, which in turn warrants greater attention from the audience and facilitates its interpretation. b) It is convenient and lowers the risk of rhetorical failure, since the templates have been approved over time. Part of this template is the introductory formula “the elders have said”.

NK: “Si on dit “les vieux ont dit”, c’est comme une plaie. Quand elle guérit, il reste toujours une cicatrice. A présent quelques uns sont alphabétisés. Où est-ce qu’ils ont trouvé les mots pour écrire? Ce n’est pas dans leur langue?...C’est comme ça. Même si on dit: “Les vieux disent” – ce ne sont pas les vieux qui ont inventé tous les proverbes.” (Int. 08/06/95)

In vivid terms, the critic illustrates the idea of a template and the pre-proverb formula as one of its (optional) constituents by comparing it, firstly, to a scar which would remain (= template or formula) while the wound (= original/specific proverb) had healed long ago, and secondly, to people who would learn how to write (= create new proverbs) by drawing on their knowledge of language in its spoken form (= templates). As also becomes clear, the formula, at least in the eyes of NK, does not necessarily prove the proverb’s antiquity (“même si on dit...ce ne sont pas les vieux qui ont inventé tous les proverbes”). Instead, it is considered a formal element which may serve several rhetorical functions in a given speech context. Other than increasing the attention value of a *kwankyamə* (announcement of code-switching and genre), it improves the rhetorical power of a proverb by lending it credibility through reference to ancient wisdom. In the same vein, the standard expressions “as we all know” or “as it is known” are placed before ancient and new proverbs in order to enhance the persuasive force through an appeal to collective wisdom. Although starting from different precepts, the rhetorical function of the formula is also to the fore in the following statement:

---

arise, and new proverbs are born through analogy with older ones or through artistic play.” (1936: 7). See also appendix 4.

DN: "Si on dit "les anciens disent" – c'est pour glorifier les anciens. On peut débiter sans dire "les anciens disaient". C'est pour indiquer que ce n'est pas toi, qui as inventé ce proverbe, mais les anciens. On veut montrer que "Nous, nous suivons les traces des ancêtres." (Int. 26/05/95)

Unlike NK, this critic regards the formula not as a shallow phrase, readily exploitable regardless of who has actually composed the saying. To him, it is a clear indication of authorship ("ce n'est pas toi qui as inventé le proverbe mais les anciens"). Yet, as he also admits, it nonetheless fulfils a certain function, namely to express the speaker's reverence for the wisdom of the ancestors. That the use of the formula is not only a habit but a deliberate choice, becomes clear from the fact that it is equally acceptable to apply an ancient proverb without such an element. In doing so, however, the speaker deprives himself of a convenient means to enhance the rhetorical power of the *kwankyamə*, since a hint about authorship implies the age and historicity of the saying and warrants its valuable use.<sup>18</sup> Apart from formal elements, ancient proverbs may also suggest certain tropes and draw attention to the metaphorical value of certain images (clichés/ properties). Yet it is not only the body of popular *kwankyamə* which serves as a source of inspiration – the immediate surroundings may also supply the proverb speaker with fitting analogies:

SF: "Nous disons ce que nous voyons. Nous n'apprenons pas nécessairement. Les vieilles parlent de leur temps aussi. Chaque génération a ses proverbes." (Int. 07/06/95)

To this young woman, the main source of inspiration is the immediate surroundings ("ce que nous voyons") which provide the speaker with ready analogies. The body of *kwankyamə* will therefore change over time. Old proverbs will be dismissed and new ones added.<sup>19</sup> In terms of style or imagery, there are, at least in principle, no restrictions:

---

<sup>18</sup> This holds most evidently for attributive proverbs which make up the largest part of the cultural stock of proverbs and are the easiest to remember.

<sup>19</sup> In emphasizing the 'contemporary' aspect in proverb speaking, we should not forget that we are dealing with a still predominantly rural society, where changes take place only slowly and the imagery of ancient and new proverbs is often identical.

AC: "Est-ce que, dans les proverbes nouvellement inventés, on peut utiliser des termes de la vie quotidienne à savoir la voiture, la craie?"

BK: "Oui, on peut les utiliser, car Tagali disait la dernière fois: "Quand tu écris quelque chose dans un cahier, pour le lire, il faut l'ouvrir et attendre la page." " (Int. 25/03/96)

According to BK, the aptness of the imagery ultimately depends on the rhetorical function of the proverb. It is its appropriateness in the speech context and the aptness of the analogy which are essential, not the terms themselves. To corroborate this view, he cites a recent example, where a neighbour had successfully deployed a newly composed *kwankyamə* in a situation which called for patience and careful action ("quand tu écris quelque chose dans un cahier, pour le lire, il faut l'ouvrir et attendre la page."). It is the proverb's meaningful use in the given circumstances which justifies the use of 'modern' elements such as 'exercise book' or 'page' ("on peut les utiliser, *car* Tagali disait..."). In sum, despite certain preferences for stylistic or formal-structural elements, there is ultimately no other requirement than to comply with the primary generic criteria and produce a (potentially) meaningful analogy. Let us now turn to the main subject of this chapter: the question of quality assessment.

### 3. Quality assessment

Quality assessment is an area of investigation which has received little attention so far.<sup>20</sup> This can be ascribed to mainly two factors: firstly, many studies build on the notion of a proverb as embodying ancient and collective wisdom. This excludes (or at least ignores) *a priori* the possibility of a creative agent and thus renders futile any inquiry into qualitative differences. Secondly, there are the encounters in the field, where local speakers are either reported to be hesitant to comment in abstract terms on notions of quality, or seem not to have developed

---

<sup>20</sup> The term 'quality assessment' instead of 'aesthetics' is particularly apt for genres which operate on different levels and display not only aesthetic but also functional qualities (unlike storytelling for example) and form part of both oral literature and political language.

a meta-discourse at all.<sup>21</sup> There are nonetheless exceptions. In particular two studies deserve to be mentioned, both dealing with the notion of quality in the Akan proverb tradition. The findings vary according to the theoretical interest. Boadi, in concentrating on literary aspects, identifies the quality of imagery as the primary evaluative criterion, while Yankah, in taking a performative approach, develops his analysis around the idea of communicative competence and discerns text and context sensitivity, quality of voice, correctness of quotation etc. as distinguishing factors (Boadi 1972: 185; Yankah 1989a: 137-38). Despite some similarities, quality assessment among the Berba nonetheless differs from the Akan tradition, not only in terms of the diversity of evaluative criteria, including textual, contextual and moral aspects, but also in terms of their priorities, placing the quality of proverb *use*, i.e. its application in verbal interaction, above all other criteria. To approach the indigenous conception of quality we will start with a brief, but insightful statement which came as a spontaneous response to the question:

AC: “C’est quoi – un bon *kwankyamə*?”

NK: “Un bon *kwankyamə*, c’est si tu le racontes et on trouve un bon résultat. Parce que c’était un bon conseil.” (Int. 08/06/95)

According to NK, the notion of quality is closely associated with a proverb’s efficiency in verbal interaction (“si tu le racontes”) and its *positive* influence on the listener (“on trouve un bon résultat”). It is expected to bring about an amelioration of a situation by providing valuable advice and getting the listener to change his attitude accordingly. We can therefore already state that it is the communicative and hence the moral value of a proverb which is most highly estimated. The latter point becomes clearly evident from the following statement:

YK: “Au cours des comparaisons les bons proverbes nous guérissent en fait, dans la mesure où ils éduquent, nous condamnent et nous font éviter certaines choses.” (Int. 25/03/96)

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Yankah (1989b).



As “guérissent”, “éduquent” and “condamnent” indicate, it is the cultural canon of norms and values towards which the change is directed and from which the advisory value stems.

To fully comprehend the concept of quality in the Berba proverb tradition, we must not content ourselves with the evaluative criteria describing the product, but inquire into the process which leads to it. The guiding question is: what does a speaker have to do in order to succeed in proverb use? In terms of the process we have to distinguish between two analytical dimensions: a referential and a rhetorical one. A speaker not only has to procure good advice but also has to make the listener accept and follow it so that the situation can improve. Let us begin with the first aspect and contemplate the determinant factors of a proverb’s advisory value. As noted earlier on, one of the constituent elements of a *kwankyamə* is its potential for meaningful use, its capacity to provide insight and advice in a given situation due to the verity on the literal level. Now, to produce this effect it must be aptly applied, i.e its inherent truth must be skilfully integrated with analogous features in the respective speech context. Hence, if we are talking about the advisory value of a proverb in verbal interaction, we are talking in fact about the speaker’s ability to bring to bear the inherent property of the genre and put it to its intended use. For our discussion, it follows that it is the *use* of a genre, the skilful exploitation of its expressive potential for appropriate ends, which is at the heart of the indigenous quality assessment.

A similar argument can be made with regard to the second point, the rhetorical dimension of proverb use. The set situation is someone wanting to exert a positive influence on someone else and get him to change his attitude to the former’s advantage. To assess the full impact of this situation, we have to call to mind what has been noted in earlier chapters on the basic precepts underpinning language use in Berba society: in a segmentary system, the principal way to exert some influence on others, at least on the inter-segmental level, is by persuasion. Rhetorically, this translates into diction of truth and clarity (compare chapters 2 and 3). At the same time, however, another factor comes in, which is as influential as the need for persuasion. It is the requirement

of conflict management which plays a pivotal role in a potentially unstable society such as the Berba. Now, an attempt to change someone's mind implies that speaker does not approve of someone's opinion. Naturally, any counselling or criticism may easily be mistaken for personal offence and worsen instead of improving a given situation. The apposite way to avoid such a counterproductive effect is to adopt a rhetoric of indirectness. What are the implications for the notion of quality in the proverb tradition? As the following statement shows, a proverb is seen as an integral part of ongoing verbal interaction:

NK: "Un proverbe, c'est comme la parole. Quand quelqu'un parle et tu l'écoutes, tu sais comment le satisfaire par des proverbes." (Int. 09/04/96)

To compare it to ordinary language ("la parole") means to ascribe it the status of a conversational genre. As such it not only contributes to the overall aim that directs speech, but is also subjected to the rules and principles that govern it – in the present case, the requirement of persuasion and conflict avoidance, or, in rhetorical terms, of clarity, truth and indirectness. As we will see, a *kwankyamə* constitutes, by its very nature, an ideal means to comply with these partly conflicting exigencies. Its properties allow the speaker to offer insights, to issue advice and eventually persuade the addressee of the need to follow it, without necessarily offending him. Again, it is the quality of the *use* of the genre, the skilful and morally appropriate exploitation of its inherent properties (here: its discursive value), which is critically assessed.

To get a full picture of quality in proverb speaking and comprehend the notion of artful speech, let us take a closer look at the properties and rhetorical functions of a proverb, since these are what the speaker is expected to exploit if he is to put the genre to its intended use. The analysis is based on a number of interviews I had with local critics about the function and role of *kwankyamə* in verbal interaction.

### 3.1. Use of attention value

A precondition to changing someone's mind is to get him to listen. Here already a proverb is of great use. As an analogy, deployed in a conversational speech context, it is particularly prone to attract attention, for it represents a distinct moment of code-switching. Three techniques are known to reinforce this effect: the first technique is to position the proverb at the beginning of a speech before the main argument is expounded. Being surprised by the abrupt intrusion of a different speech genre, the audience is on the alert, curious to learn the referential context which contains the 'solution to the riddle', that is the clue to the intended meaning. Another means is to deploy a new proverb. Being confronted with a new analogy is an intellectual challenge which is highly valued by many listeners, for it promises new insights and a cognitive and aesthetic satisfaction. Finally, the pre-proverb formula "the elders have said" is considered as a suitable means to heighten the audience's attention and improve their willingness to ponder on the content and meaning of a proverb:

NK: "[...] on doit se référer aux ancêtres pour être écouté." (Int.  
09/04/96)

By referring to the ancestors, the speaker puts the saying in line with an oral tradition that is renowned for valuable insights and advice. In this way he increases the chance being listened to, since his utterance is expected to be true and revealing. The deployment of a pre-proverb formula has yet another advantage. It reinforces the moment of code-switching, brought about by the abrupt intrusion of a formula into a prose speech context. This is particularly useful in the case of newly invented non-attributive proverbs, whose elaborate prose does not always allow them to be immediately recognized as a *kwankyamə*. The formula sets the interpretative frame and facilitates the comprehension of the saying.

### 3.2. Use of explanatory value

NK: "Pour bien expliquer des choses, il faut des proverbes...C'est seulement, si tu n'arrives pas à bien expliquer ce que tu veux, que ça devient une catastrophe." (Int. 09/04/96)

DD: "Un bon proverbe doit trancher un problème." (Int. 25/03/96)

NK: "Un proverbe doit être là pour comprendre." (Int. 04/06/95)

One of the principal assets of a *kwankyamə*, then, is its explanatory value. Thanks to its faculty to explain ("expliquer") or dissect ("trancher") a subject matter, it helps to communicate ideas and render a proposition comprehensible, if not acceptable ("(il) doit être là pour comprendre").<sup>22</sup> What exactly constitutes the explanatory value of a *kwankyamə*? As clearly emerges from the statements, it is the explication of the context situation, whether general subject or concrete problem ("problème"), which is required. For a *kwankyamə*, this means that it is the level of the applied meaning which is expected to provide the explanatory value; moreover, it is this level which will be critically assessed. From the discussion of the operating mechanism of a *kwankyamə*, we know that several steps are required to decode the applied meaning. They are

- a) the comprehension of the proverb situation,
- b) the deduction of the paradigmatic principle (provided the *kwankyamə* is not an abstract maxim) and
- c) the identification of analogous features in the context situation.

Apart from selecting a fitting analogy a speaker has to render it as easy as possible to disclose the applied meaning, if he intends to maximize the proverb's explanatory value. Various strategies are known to foster this end:

---

<sup>22</sup> Similar functions (to instruct, persuade, prevent, remonstrate against) are noted for the proverb use among the Haya of Tanzania (Seitel 1972: 68-89).

### 3.2.1. Choice of imagery

One technique is to adapt the imagery to the background of experience of the addressee. An example will be provided further below (paragraph on indirectness).

### 3.2.2. Composition of new proverbs

As it has just been pointed out, one of the tasks is to find an analogy which conveys most poignantly the speaker's view on a given subject matter. If none of the proverbs known to him provides a fitting *kwankyamə*, he will have to coin a new one:

IT: "Si on suit un chemin et le chemin n'est pas droit – on peut prendre une abréviation pour ne pas suivre tout le chemin, n'est-ce pas?. Quand une occasion se présente, on n'a pas besoin de se servir d'un ancien proverbe. On coupe au milieu, là où on le trouve." (Int. 12/05/96)

In drawing on the image of a winding path, the critic suggests that it is more reasonable to cut short a long-winded argument by coining a new proverb instead of relying on an old one which would approximate, yet not fully cover the problem at hand. The appreciation of this technique becomes clear when we take into account the emic approach towards novelty:

AC: "Est-ce qu'il y a une différence entre donner et inventer un proverbe?"

NK: "Il n'y a pas trop de différence. Même si c'est un nouveau proverbe, on trouve facilement son sens si on est intelligent ou habitué aux explications des proverbes." (Int. 25/03/96)

According to NK, an audience which is reasonably intelligent and acquainted with the proverb tradition will make little difference between a known and an unknown *kwankyamə*, since the real challenge rests with the analogic transfer, which will always be 'new', whether or not the proverb has been known

beforehand.<sup>23</sup> As far as the speaker is concerned, he will run through his personal stock of imagery and maxims – popular *kwankyamə*, but also ‘undigested’ impressions – and choose the most appropriate one depending on the intended meaning.<sup>24</sup> That to the experienced proverb user this is a matter of split seconds suggests the following statement:

DN: “Pour les proverbes, c’est comme un rêve. Ça t’apparaît et tu le dis.” (Int. 18/01/92)

### 3.2.3. Positioning of the proverb in the text

Another way to improve the explanatory value is to effectively place the proverb in the text and link it with the main argument. Ideally both elements should form a coherent entity, each clarifying and illuminating one another, and reinforcing their rhetorical power. In principle, there are no restrictions as to the position and number of *kwankyamə* in a text. The speaker is free to deploy a proverb in the beginning, the middle or at the end of his discourse. Also, he may use one single *kwankyamə*, but also apply several proverbs, if not entire proverb clusters.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as one critic warningly remarks:

<sup>23</sup> Creativity in proverb speaking can be arranged on a scale of increasing ‘novelty’: at the lower end are popular proverbs with a standard context of use, followed by popular proverbs with a shifting context of use, followed by new proverbs in a new speech context. Novelty, in turn, is measured against the personal stock of proverbs of the individual listener (not every popular proverb is necessarily known to each member of the speech community).

<sup>24</sup> Despite the high esteem for original coinages, critics tend to prefer popular proverbs to new creations, if they both carry the same meaning. As the following statement readily shows, this preference is rooted in an appreciation of the *quality* of the ancient imagery, its truth and useful applicability, which renders a forced originality futile and, moreover, evinces a poor acquaintance with the cultural stock of proverbs: “On peut les utiliser, mais le plus souvent on se rend compte facilement que le proverbe a été inventé récemment. Par conséquent les hommes n’attachent pas trop d’attention à cela. Tu peux raconter des proverbes à propos d’une voiture mais les hommes saisiront le sens très vite. On peut raconter un proverbe sur la voiture car, avant, on disait souvent “faut-il me transformer en un vent pour arriver à tel endroit très vite?” Donc, comme actuellement il y a les voitures, on peut les emprunter et raconter des proverbes en les comparant au vent.” (NK in Int. 25/03/96). This kind of comment is typical for the assessment of *kwankyamə* out of context. In judging the quality of proverbs in verbal interaction, the question of imagery becomes secondary.

<sup>25</sup> The term ‘proverb-clusters’ denotes loosely connected string of analogies. Most evidently, this technique bears a high rhetorical risk, since there is a good chance that the listener will soon be confused by the variety of different images, whose meaning is

DD: "...on ne peut pas raconter n'importe quel proverbe à n'importe quel moment. Ça doit tomber 'taque' (*də yelə*).<sup>26</sup> Si non, les autres vont dire "*də kwa hao*" – "ça n'a pas de sens."  
(Int. 25/03/96)

Hence, what matters and should ultimately inform the positioning of the proverb, is the fit with the main text or argument ("tomber 'taque' "). Otherwise the speaker risks impeding the comprehension of the applied meaning, if not obfuscating the entire argument ("ça n'a pas de sens"). The application of a proverb is cued by the speech situation itself:

IT: "Si la situation se présente, ça te donne l'image pour comparer (*də nwa*)."  
(Int. 12/05/95)

DN: "...on regarde d'abord ce que l'autre dit. Après tu peux donner ton proverbe."  
(Int. 18/01/92)

It is either the context ("ce que l'autre dit") or the interaction situation ("si la situation se présente") which triggers the use of a proverb.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2.4. Structuring the main text/ argument

The relation between proverb and text has been described in terms of a symbiosis where the two elements are woven together to a meaningful whole, one complementing and corroborating the other, and both operating towards the same goal, which is to illuminate a certain point. As far as the composition of the prose text is concerned, this necessitates a careful development of the main argument; otherwise the cardinal point and with it the analogies to the proverb situation will not become apparent. Furthermore, it obliges the adjustment of the reasoning to the positioning of the proverb in the text. Two types can be distinguished: First, there is the practice of introducing an argument or a speech with a *kwankyamə*. This technique has the advantage of

---

only gradually unravelled. If the explanatory value remains unaffected, however, this technique is perfectly acceptable.

<sup>26</sup> Instead of *də yelə* we also find *də deise suru*. Both expressions are also used in the context of riddling and calculating.

<sup>27</sup> Compare Yankah and his detailed investigation of proverb cues (1989a: 118-37).

heightening the attention value as well as having a pacifying effect by diverting the audience's attention towards a metaphor or abstract principle before the main argument is set out (see below). The sudden intrusion of a different code, however, also bears a considerable risk. Being faced with the analogy to a reasoning which is yet to follow, the listener is forced to think along two different lines, which may eventually confuse him: he has to comprehend the unfolding argument, while at the same time keeping in mind the initial 'riddle', always on the alert to recognize analogous relationships. To lower the rhetorical risk and facilitate the comprehension of the intended meaning, speakers tend to follow an introductory proverb with what Yankah labels a 'transitional gloss', a brief passage linking proverb and text and smoothing over the transition from the analogy to the main argument. In most cases it takes the form of a short formula, such as "this is why..." or "from that it follows...", indicating that the subsequent text provides the referential context to the proverb. In a more elaborate fashion, it may also occur as a lengthy exegesis, in which individual properties of the proverb situation are highlighted and clear hints are given as to where to look for analogous features in the context situation. It is usually introduced by the transitional gloss "it is like" or "it is comparable to".<sup>28</sup> This technique is considered particularly apt when there are serious doubts about the audience's intellectual ability to conduct the transfer by themselves. If, on the contrary, the audience is judged witty and experienced enough, it suffices to follow up the proverb with a carefully structured argument which enables the individual disclosure of the applied meaning.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, we find the practice of concluding proverbs. Marking the end of an argument/ a speech, it constitutes a powerful statement – a figurative expression which highlights a given point and renders it more conspicuous by re-directing the listener's mind towards the precedent text and enabling its focused review in the light of the concluding

<sup>28</sup> The formula is an important genre marker for non-attributive proverbs, such as extended metaphors, parables or tales.

<sup>29</sup> Although it could be argued that the preconditions for this technique are not perfect in a conversational speech context, we ought not to forget that according to the Berba ideal of verbal interaction, each speaker is allocated some time to structure his speech and set out undisturbedly his argument. He thus may weave together *kwankyame* and the main arguments into a coherent text in which each code is positioned at its most efficient place.



remark. The precondition is, once more, a carefully structured text or argument from which the proverb conclusively flows, naming or summarizing the main points.<sup>30</sup>

Having discussed the primacy of a proverb's explanatory value in the indigenous quality assessment, we can understand that formal or stylistic aspects such as length or choice of wording and imagery are only of secondary importance (compare the paragraph on creativity). In the indigenous view, they are directly dependent upon a *kwankyamə*'s function and effectiveness in verbal interaction.

### 3.2.5. Length

NK: "On peut être court, non? Il est long dans la mesure où le public auquel tu t'adresses ne saisit pas bien le sens du proverbe. Dans ce cas tu tentes de diluer le proverbe [...] C'est le manque de compréhension qui allonge le proverbe." (Int. 25/03/96)

To NK there is no doubt: length is not a *primary* evaluative criterion but a linguistic feature which is subordinate to the communicative intent and as such dependent upon the assumed intellectual faculty of the addressee as well as the speaker's skill in deploying an apposite proverb. Although the ideal is a concise saying which not only illuminates a problem, but does so in an aesthetically appealing and witty way ("on peut être court"), it is perfectly acceptable to expound a *kwankyamə* as long as necessary to ensure at least a minimum of comprehension among the audience ("C'est le manque de compréhension qui allonge le proverbe").

---

<sup>30</sup> In reviewing the collected data, it appears that it is more common to precede than to conclude a text by a proverb. It hence sets the Berba genre apart from other African proverb traditions, where the proverb is regarded as a typical closure, deployed in order to "catalyze the audience's digestion of the speaker's argument." (Yankah 1989a: 111), to serve as a mnemonic device or to corroborate an argument in a powerful way. Several reasons might account for this difference: A proverb which introduces a speech can certainly be ascribed greater attention value than a concluding proverb. Furthermore, it is a much more impressive demonstration of the speaker's wit, since it requires a conception of the entire text beforehand, whereas a concluding proverb can consistently be deduced from the text.

### 3.2.6. Style

In a similar vein, the choice of wording is not a *primary* evaluative criterion either, but is assessed in terms of the proverb's communicative function:

DN: "...quand le proverbe est bien placé dans le raisonnement on ne se rend plus compte des mots qu'il contient." (Int. 08/06/95)

The ultimate criterion to decide on the quality of a proverb is not the wording itself, but the way in which it contributes to the principal argument, which in turn depends on its position within the text and the way it links up to and elucidates the main points ("bien placé dans le raisonnement"). The logic on which this attitude builds becomes clear if we call to mind the operating mechanism of an analogy. What matters in an actual speech context is the comprehension of the intended meaning. It is disclosed by the application of a paradigmatic principle to a context situation. In the case of metaphorical proverbs, this means that the principle has to be deduced first from the imagery by identifying abstract classes and their logical relationships to each other. The effect: "On ne se rend plus compte des mots qu'il contient". We have to understand the following remark in the same vein:

DD: "Tout est utilisable: pénis, vagin – ça ne fait même pas rire. Ce qui est important, c'est le raisonnement. S'il s'agit d'un assassinat ou d'un vol, en tout cas s'il s'agit d'un problème sérieux, pour le résoudre il n'y a pas la honte." (1996, II: 109)

To DD, what matters is the reasoning ("le raisonnement"). Yet as he states more precisely, the question of style is not entirely irrelevant. The degree to which it matters depends on the circumstances in which it is uttered. If the proverb occurs in a particular situation where people interact in a more playful way and their interest is as much in the wit and aesthetic of a *kwankyamə* as in its conversational value, the quality of imagery may indeed be subject to critical evaluation.<sup>31</sup> If it is used, however, in a situation where the focus is entirely on

---

<sup>31</sup> Imagery will, however, never gain precedence over the aspects of truth and meaningful applicability. By that it differs from the Akan tradition, where it appears that "the varied emotional and intellectual reactions shown by native speakers to

the applied meaning, as for example in a serious debate where it is necessary to obtain clarity on certain issues, the notion of style is negligible (“s’il s’agit d’un problème sérieux, pour le résoudre il n’y a pas la honte”). The primacy of a *kwankyamə*’s efficiency in verbal interaction also accounts for the fact that the corpus of Berba *kwankyamə* integrates abstract maxims and metaphorical sayings, both of which are (at least theoretically) equally appreciated.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.3. Use of truth value

Persuasive argumentation, it has been argued, relies not only on clear diction, but also on the supply of evidence to verify and substantiate a certain point. Now, in the discussion on genre, ‘truth’ on the literal level has been identified as one of the primary definitional criteria of a *kwankyamə*. This means that a proverb, whether it occurs as a metaphor or an abstract maxim, is potentially imaginable and acceptable to the listener. The effect is twofold: firstly, the speaker’s credibility is enhanced and with it the listener’s willingness to listen to and follow the reasoning. Secondly, it represents a powerful source of evidence (*topos*) which renders it a suitable device to corroborate a certain point or serve as an argument in its own right. To maximize this effect, the speaker is advised to adapt the imagery to the background of experience of the addressee. Apart

---

proverbs are conditioned more evidently by the aesthetic value of these proverbs - the quality of the imagery and of the wit - than by their moral content and truth value.” (Boadi 1972: 185).

<sup>32</sup> Again, quality assessment slightly differs depending on whether it is an isolated proverb or a proverb in context which is being evaluated. In the first case, there is a notable preference for metaphorical proverbs, as the following sequence from the genre discussion suggests:

AC: “Vouloir c’est pouvoir.”

KY: “Prends l’exemple d’une vieille. Elle a décidé d’aller chez sa fille pour participer à une cérémonie. Même s’il pleut, elle va y aller. Mais, supposant qu’elle n’a pas vraiment eu l’intention d’y aller, elle va dire qu’il fait froid dehors et fermer sa porte.”

NT: “Les Berba disent: “Là, où la vieille veut aller, il ne fait pas froid.”

The abstract maxim is accepted as a *kwankyamə*, yet, as NT makes plain, preference would be given to its metaphorical equivalent. KY provides the literal explanation of the principle contained in the proverb. There is also a penchant for metaphorical proverbs in conversational speech contexts. Here, the reason lies in the greater persuasive value which inheres in a metaphor. Thanks to its pictorial value it is not only prone to attract the listener’s interest but also offers a source of evidence - the proverb situation - for the truth of the paradigmatic principle.

from facilitating the comprehension of the intended meaning, it also increases the likelihood of the addressee affirming the truth at least on the literal level and render him more receptive to the principal argument.

#### 4. Indirectness

So far we have dealt with one aspect of a *kwankyamə*'s rhetorical value, its capacity to get an addressee to change his mind by clarifying a certain point and persuading him of the worth and value of the advice. The act of counselling, however, may also have the opposite effect and generate discord instead of settling it. Being exposed to criticism, the addressee may feel offended and close his mind to the advice or, worse, get enraged and pick a quarrel. Again, it is the proverb tradition which serves well in this regard. Its capacity for indirectness and allusion allows for the delivery of a criticism or advice without forcibly annoying the other. The Berba are clearly aware of the advantages of this function in the service of conflict management:

NT: "Un proverbe, c'est pour dire une chose à quelqu'un que tu veux critiquer pour qu'il sache, qu'il corrige ses mauvaises actions sans qu'il se fâche." (Int. 08/06/95)

SK: "...dénoncer certains faits directement, ça choque." (Int. 13/05/95)

The capacity of a proverb to deliver criticism and advice in an indirect way, to get the addressee to "corrige ses mauvaises actions sans qu'il se fâche", has frequently been noted in proverb scholarship (Finnegan 1970: 408-09; Monye 1987; Okezie 1977: 175; Seitel 1972: 85-86, 1976; Smith and Dale 1920: 311; Yankah 1989a: 86-87). The effect derives from the operating mechanism of an analogy in verbal interaction, which includes two different processes - the audible transmission of a literal meaning by the speaker and the silent decoding of the applied, intended meaning by the addressee. On the literal level, proverbs are thus impersonal, ascribed to a third source which renders them able to explore, in the abstract, matters which are difficult or distressing to discuss directly (cf. Yankah 1989a: 41-42).

In the Berba tradition of proverb speaking, two techniques are known to improve this effect by skilfully positioning the proverb in the text .

#### 4.1. Introductory proverb

IT: “Quand on veut attraper un poulet, on jette le mil d’abord. Le proverbe est pareil. Quand tu jettes le mil, le poulet oublie et tu l’attrapes. Si quelqu’un s’énervé, tu parles un peu en proverbes pour le calmer, et après tu l’attrapes.” (Int. 12/05/95)

TY: “On peut donner des proverbes pour refroidir les cœurs. Après l’explication du proverbe il sera satisfait, il sera en joie et peut t’écouter.” (Int. 04/06/95)

As readily emerges from the statements, the de-personalized character of a proverb may serve a very specific end, namely to appease or calm down an outraged listener and get him back into a state where he is receptive to reason. How is this achieved? To illustrate the mechanism, IT draws on an example from everyday life. A common practice for catching a hen is to throw some grains in front of it. The hen, attracted by the seed, forgets about the danger and becomes an easy prey. In a similar vein, if a situation becomes tense and difficult, a speaker should start with a *kwankyamə* before setting out the main argument. The listener, surprised by the sudden interjection, re-directs his thoughts away from an anticipated line of reasoning and towards the general principles contained in the proverb. According to the critics, the time factor, the split seconds that it takes to reflect on the literal sense of the proverb, together with the impersonal nature of the analogy have a twofold effect: Firstly, the listener is distracted, concentrates on the abstract content of a saying, and calms down at least for a moment (“calmer”, “refroidir”). The hope is that he regains a more stable mood and a constructive discussion can ensue. Secondly, he has opened himself up to the speaker and (involuntarily) made a first attempt to comprehend the argument by contemplating it in the abstract. Subsequently, he may want to listen to the rest as well, either curious to compare his interpretation with the speaker’s intended meaning or out of a genuine interest

in the argument (“Après l’explication du proverbe il sera satisfait, il sera en joie et peut t’écouter”).<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.2. Concluding proverb

While an introductory proverb is intended to draw the listener into an argument, a concluding proverb serves the opposite end, namely to guide the audience out of the prose text by summarizing the main points in an impersonal, aesthetically appealing and intellectually challenging code. How effectively this potential for indirectness can be used and how closely linguistic and moral aspects are interconnected is shown in the example of a litigation session. It was recorded on 23 January 1996 in the small village of Yopiaka and subsequently commented on by ND, one of the participants in the event. The proceedings had been instituted by a young woman of Yopiaka who claimed compensation from a woman of Kotari for some valuables she had lost in a fight with her. The participants in the debate were:

KG (aged 76) village head of Yopiaka,  
KW (60) and GN (42), councillors of KG,  
NN (25) from Yopiaka, plaintiff,  
KT (23) from Kotari, defendant,  
ND (35) councillor of Kotari, visiting guest,  
SA (51) and TD (50) husbands of NN and KT

Additionally, a considerable number of other villagers followed the proceedings, which took place in front of KG’s compound in the centre of Yopiaka.

After the *chef de village* has formally opened the hearing, he allows NN to set out and justify her complaint. As she explains, she had repeatedly suffered verbal aggression, launched against her by KT on their return from the weekly market in the neighbouring Matéri. Unaware of any reason that could have given rise to such aggression, she had finally been obliged to resort to the last weapon and defend herself by physical means. In the course of the fight she lost

---

<sup>33</sup> This is not to exaggerate the persuasive force of a proverb. Having decoded the proverb’s applied meaning, the listener may well dismiss the proposition as incompatible with his own view.

a good deal of her jewellery and clothes, for which she now claimed compensation. In her defence KT puts forward the objection that the initial provocation had come from NN and that any reactions on her part were only to be seen as adequate responses to a conduct which remained enigmatic to her. She had also lost personal belongings during the fight and their value would exceed by far the value of NN's losses.

Such a quarrel could have easily been settled, had it not been known to most of the participants that the true cause for the fight was not verbal attacks but jealousy concerning the same man. NN, although married for more than eight years, had entertained a prolonged affair with a young man from a neighbouring village, before her lover had split up with her and begun an affair with KT, also married at that time. Initially ignorant about the identity of her predecessor, repeated verbal attacks on the part of NN made it soon very clear who had been the past girl-friend of her lover. On a return from the market in Matéri the dispute culminated in a violent fight. Viewed against this background the harmless claim for compensation became a highly delicate affair. To reveal the true cause of their fight would automatically lay open a past of treachery and, worst of all, of adultery. Both women had been married when they started their affair with the same man. Now, adultery is one of the worst crimes in Berba customary law. Apart from causing infertility it represents a serious threat to social peace, since violent conflicts between the husband, his wife's lover and their families may ensue. In the context of the litigation session it was therefore necessary not only to deal with the claim for compensation but also to tackle the issue of adultery and commit the women to future fidelity. Yet for one reason a straightforward process was almost impossible. The arbitrating elders as well as a considerable part of the assisting audience were familiar with the background of the conflict, but not the husbands (at least that was the assumption of the board of arbitrators). If they now brought up the issue of adultery in direct terms, they would risk not only a loss of face on the part of the two husbands, but also provoke an open conflict between them and the lover of their wives. As the following sequence shows, it is the genre *kwankyama* which is of great value in such a delicate situation, for it is capable of meeting the opposite requirements of clarity/ persuasion and indirectness and reconciling conflicting

ends – in this case to both have a serious talk with the women and avoid future conflicts by sparing the husbands from public ridicule.

After having heard plaintiff and defendant, the elders start an inquiry in order to gain clarity about the past history of the fight. Soon it becomes apparent that the *chef de village* and one of his councillors hope to get the women to disclose the true reasons for the conflict. Suddenly, ND, the visiting councillor of Kotari, takes the floor and declares:

“It seems that you, honourable elders, not only want to treat the actual conflict of the women, but also all that has happened before that [...] If you really intend to bring it up, it will have considerable consequences. What I wanted to say [1] *“If you spill some oil, it runs down the heel. What is spoilt, is spoilt.”* [2] *“If you sleep with someone, it is futile to want to hide your backside. The other one will wake up and if your backside lies bare, he will see it.”* You, the elders, you have heard both parties and will know what to do in order to bring the affair to a close and give good advice...After that you must not hear anymore that these here (i.e. the women) quarrel. If they continue nonetheless and you catch them, you know what way to indicate to them.”<sup>34</sup>

In a subsequent discussion ND explains first of all the literal sense of [1], a popular *kwankyamə*:

“Once something has happened, you have to accept it, for once the oil is spilled, you cannot collect it again. If you want to profit from it at least a bit, you have to collect whatever is left and rub it over your feet.”

His advice is hence to make the best of a troubled situation. The intent is to persuade the elders not to insist on the revelation of the past adultery. Apart from an extremely unpleasant surprise for both husbands, social peace would also be greatly endangered. ND’s proposition is therefore to treat the issue of adultery in an indirect way or to entirely ignore it. The advantage of using a *kwankyamə* in this context lies in its impersonal character which allows ND to

---

<sup>34</sup> Here, as throughout the investigation, the proverbs used in an actual speech context are put in italics.



criticize a higher ranking person (KG is older than ND) without directly offending him. Although suggesting a certain way forward, he leaves it to the arbitrators to actually follow his advice. As regards *kwankyamə* [2], ND comments at length on its literal and applied meaning:

“If you sleep with someone, it makes no sense to try and hide anything from him. In this case everything is clear – the reason why it is futile to try to hide anything from someone with whom you are living together [...] In such a case it is not necessary to voice everything. On the other hand I wanted to lend expression to my conviction that one must not lie [...] Why did I use a *kwankyamə* at all? In order to influence the thoughts of the arbitrators. After the litigation they turned to me and said: “Your words have enlightened us. You are right. Our mind had been dulled.”

To fully appreciate ND’s contribution, we have to call to mind one particularity of the genre, namely its inherent ambiguity. It results from the semantic complexity which is characteristic of any analogy that consists of more than one term. The paradigmatic principle, contained in the proverb situation, may have several correlates in the context situation. This is so because “almost any nontrivial pair of terms that one can think of can be seen to have more than one relationship between them” (Lieber 1984: 426). For the process of decoding, this means that there is a certain scope of interpretation, whereby the understanding of the intended meaning will be determined by the listener’s mental predisposition, his analytical faculties and semantic competence, as well as his comprehension of the context and the interaction situation. Usually, a speaker will try to lower the risk of a misinterpretation (i.e. an interpretation which is not in his sense), by giving clear indications as to the intended meaning. Under certain circumstances, however, it may be more advisable to renounce such clues and remain deliberately vague. In such a way it becomes possible to convey several messages at a time, without ever having to spell them out. It is this technique which ND skilfully exploits for the sake of social peace: with his proverb, he addresses first of all the two wives to whom he makes clear that their trespass has not remained unnoticed. The choice of imagery is deliberate.

In drawing on the imagery of sexual intercourse, he gives clear hints as to the intended meaning, which in this case is a clear warning to be aware of the risks that this situation would engender and to settle their differences as quickly as possible. Otherwise, the arbitrators would be obliged to unveil their past history. The following remark is aimed in the same direction. In asking to consider that “it would be futile to hide anything from the one closest to you” (the addressees are the elders and villagers), he implicitly urges the women to compromise soon. Since the analogy ‘partner :: neighbour’ is easy to establish, ND can be sure that the women have no difficulties in decoding the message. The second piece of advice is issued to the arbitrators. It is the admonition that there would be no need to bring the debate round to a confession of the adultery, since it was known to most of the participants anyway. In both *kwankyamə* [1] and [2], ND takes advantage of the analogic ambiguity, which not only allows several messages to be conveyed at the same time but may also exclude some listeners from the comprehension of a specific meaning at all. Since the interpretation of a proverb depends to a certain extent on the background knowledge of the addressee, a skilled speaker can manipulate his audience by the choice of imagery which will be differently interpreted according to the individual’s intelligence and background knowledge. While the arbitrators and the two wives will interpret the *kwankyamə* in the sense intended by ND, the two husbands, presuming they still have or pretend to have no clue of their wives’ infidelity, will relate the proverb to the official case and not the adultery.

As the positive reaction by the board of arbitrators shows, the speech has the desired effect. The elders accept ND’s advice not to insist on the revelation of any detail of this delicate affair and express their gratitude for having been ‘enlightened’ just in time. ND has thus notched up a double success: not only has he proved his mastery of the genre itself, but he has also exploited its capacity of indirectness for morally appropriate ends (persuasion, conflict management and conflict prevention). That the elders have indeed taken his advice seriously, is proved by the rest of the litigation session, which displays a high frequency of allusive speech. Let us conclude with another sequence which illustrates the efforts to settle the affair without mentioning the issue of adultery.

After the failure of some initial reconciliatory attempts, KG feels obliged to lend more emphasis to his words and give them a firm warning:

[3] *"We are about to dig a water hole. People are fishing therein. If the water does not suffice, there is always the wild river where to fish."*

and ND asserts:

"You say: 'We want you to indicate us the way to go washing!'  
We do not want you to fall into the river, just because you have not listened to our advice."

While the water hole represents the board of arbitrators, the wild river stands for the police, the higher administrative level where hearings take place. In the eyes of the local population it is synonymous with injustice, forceful and arbitrary action. Thus, the message is clear: if the affair is not settled soon, the case will have to be transferred to the police ("wild water"), where the women will be treated with much less leniency ("no rescue possible") and be forced to confess their adulterous past. After this unmistakable warning ND hastens to mitigate the tone by modifying KG's imagery and depicting a stretch of calm water instead of a wild river. With the explanation that the board would not want them to fall into the water just because they had shown disrespect to the elders' advice, ND shifts the focus from the threat of the executive force towards the assurance of help and the necessity to compromise. In such a way he tries to render it easier for the women to give in and agree to a settlement of the affair. In either case, the intention to resort to allusive language is the same. A critic, EI, explains:

"KG has deployed this proverb to induce the women to realize themselves what is in this case. If he is too explicit, he fears he will intimidate them. Assuming they comprehend, they will recognize that the case will be transferred to the gendarmerie if they refuse to pardon each other. With this insight they will voluntarily accept the advice" (QAY 27/03/96)

and ND adds:

“I did not want them to confess the adultery but get them to declare, “Yes, we accept that the conflict is settled.”

In EI's view, the judge has opted for a *kwankyamə* in order to get the women to recognize the dangers of their stubbornness, without being too imposing and rousing even greater obstinacy. The rationale of using an allusive mode of speaking, in turn, is rooted in the Berba perception of justice. Although an arbitrator takes a superior position and has the right to criticize, counsel or propose a verdict, there is nonetheless no way to *enforce* a judgement on the litigants. Instead, it is vital that all parties *wholeheartedly* acknowledge the verdict. Otherwise a case will not be satisfactorily settled. What is particularly interesting about the sequence, is the way in which ND tries to improve both the explanatory and the persuasive value of the metaphor by adjusting the imagery to the women's background of experience. While fishing is a man's task, he associates the notion of the wild river with the women's occupation, namely washing their clothes at the riverside. After a brief moment of reflection, the women pardon each other and compensate each other for their losses. The adultery remains unmentioned.

What can be concluded about the notion of quality in the Berba proverb tradition? Underlying the emic theory of quality assessment is the conception of a *kwankyamə* as an essentially conversational genre. It is not the genre itself which is subject to critical evaluation but the way it is deployed in verbal interaction. Quality is measured in terms of the speaker's skill in bringing to bear the inherent value of the genre and exploiting it for appropriate ends. This includes its explanatory value and persuasive force, as well as its allusive qualities, which can be put to use most effectively to comply with the ultimate criterion: constructiveness, manifest in the improvement of a situation thanks to the insight or advice contained in a proverb. Quality hence comprises two dimensions: a linguistic and a moral one. This will become even more conspicuous when we turn to the negative side of quality assessment and investigate notions of rhetorical risk and rhetorical failure.

## 5. Rhetorical risk and rhetorical failure<sup>35</sup>

In accordance with the distinction between linguistic and moral quality, two instances of rhetorical failure can be discerned:

### 5.1. Linguistic failure

NK: "Tu peux même être piégé dans un proverbe et ne pas arriver à clarifier ton raisonnement." (Int. 25/03/96)

Having noted that 'clarification' is one of the most highly regarded functions for proverb use, it comes as no surprise that its opposite, the obfuscation of a discourse or an argument ("ne pas arriver à clarifier ton raisonnement") should be dismissed as rhetorical failure. What accounts for this failure? What does "être piégé dans un proverbe" mean? One of the main reasons is the speaker's lack of proverb competence, his incapacity to master the complex mechanism of the genre and hence obfuscating instead of clarifying his reasoning. Confusion may thereby be caused by vague or indiscernible logical relations between the various terms on the literal level or incoherence on the applied level, i.e. inconsistencies in the relationship between proverb and text/ context situation. In the case of newly invented proverbs, the failure may also result from a lack of truth on the literal level. Whatever the reason, the linguistic weakness is soon apparent to the critical listener, manifest in the inability to explain the meaning on both the literal and the applied level:

NT: "Tu dois être capable de l'expliquer. Sinon, tu tâtonnes, et la réponse donnée n'est pas consistante." (Int. 08/06/95)

The reaction of the audience follows accordingly:

ND: "Tu ennues les autres. Ils ne cherchent même pas à trouver ce que tu veux dire et personne ne t'écouterà." (1996, II: 189-91)

Confused by a disordered discourse, the listener is neither able nor willing to attempt comprehension of the intended meaning of the proverb. The speaker has

---

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Yankah (1985 and 1989a: 45-46).

failed in several ways: Not only has he lost the audience's attention ("personne ne t'écouterà") but he has also gambled away the chance to convey his point of view and make a constructive contribution, for no one is interested in discerning the proverb's applied meaning ("ils ne cherchent même pas à trouver ce que tu veux dire"). Overall, however, the audience's reaction is rather lenient. On the assumption that the performance flaw does not spring from ill-will but from intellectual and linguistic deficiencies (evinced by the inability to explain the proverb's meaning), they will simply be bored and stop paying attention to his words. There is not even the need to openly criticize him, since the experience of failing is painful enough.

## 5.2. Moral failure

Much more uncompromising is the audience's attitude towards the second instance of rhetorical failure, namely ethical or moral impropriety. The yardstick is the intention of the speaker. While the audience is indulgent with someone who *unintentionally* fails, there is no excuse for *deliberate* performance flaws where the speaker *consciously* puts at risk a friendly atmosphere and abuses the constructive potential of a genre for counterproductive ends. These proverbs are termed *kwankyamə pə su*, 'bad' or 'shocking' proverbs, proverbs which "make your body tremble" (TY in Int. 25/03/96). They comprise both old and new *kwankyamə*. Two forms of shocking proverbs can be distinguished:

### 5.2.1. Deliberate obscurity

Firstly, there are those *kwankyamə* which are deliberately left unexplained. The flaw is evident: by abruptly switching code, the speaker has distracted the listeners' mind from the main strand of thought, yet does not make any move to smooth over to the prose of the argument. In lacking the referential background, there is no way to decode the proverb's intended meaning. The audience is left confused, and will reject the proverb on both linguistic and moral grounds. Not only has the speaker disturbed the flow of conversation, he has also affronted the audience by offering them a saying which seems to

convey an important truth, yet excludes them from its understanding. The reproach concerns hypocrisy and anti-social behaviour, for the speaker has abused the genre to boast of his intellectual superiority and withheld valuable insights – selfish and hence despicable behaviour. Moreover, provided that the proverb is used with an offensive intention, the addressee is given no chance to defend himself. An example may illustrate this kind of failure. On the occasion of a *hulamə*, a feast in honour of a deceased person, an elderly invitee caused considerable turmoil by suddenly slinging two *kwankyamə* at remote relatives of the deceased: “[1] *You don’t recognize your friend in moonlight. Why do you recognize him in the clear light which follows after a rain?* [2] *If a woman is about to give birth, she looks for kyarekə (herbs which protect against premature birth). If she has borne the child, the child will not survive.*” Immediately after the attack, a serious dispute ensued which eventually led to the expulsion of the elder from the *hulamə* – an unheard-of measure, bearing in mind the respect with which elders are usually treated in Berba society. An eyewitness, whom I interviewed a few days after the incident, explained what was behind the elder’s expulsion: with his first *kwankyamə* he had hurled a serious insult at the relatives. To them the abstract principle “you ignore others when they struggle with a difficult condition (“moonlight”), yet recognize them when things get better (“light after rain”)” easily translated into “you have not cared for the deceased during his lifetime, but now, after he is dead, you come together and have a good time at his expense”. The elder had thus accused them of being hypocrites of the worst kind. Furious with this imputation, the relatives assumed that the second proverb was aimed in the same direction. Yet lacking any clue to the referential background, there was no way to disclose its intended meaning. The ultimate cause for the expulsion of the elder was his obstinate refusal to explain what he had in mind when he was using the proverb. It was perceived as a double offence: apart from suspecting a slander, possibly even more offensive than the first one, the addressees also felt publicly ridiculed by being exposed to a riddle they could not resolve (ND 1995, I: 99-101).

That hypocrisy in proverb speaking (as in social behaviour in general) is a weighty offence, becomes evident from the fact that it not only constitutes a major issue in the local evaluative discourse, but is also a recurrent theme in Berba tales which are supposed to teach moral principles. Most instructive in this regard is a popular *swombəfə* which treats the problem of the use and abuse of verbal skills. In the following part we will inspect the first half of the tale, and analyze it on the basis of an indigenous evaluation. The tale is presented in a word-by-word translation *byali*-English and followed by a brief summary of the second half of the tale.<sup>36</sup> It was told by SY, a 46 year old woman from Matéri, on 2 February 1996.

- 1 "Once there was a man, who got up and said that he would master all *kwankyamə*.
- 2 He claimed to be more intelligent (*kyagu*) than anyone else (in the world).
- 3 There would be no one he would not catch with his words (i.e. speak in a way that they would not find an equivalent response and be defeated).
- 4 He bred a cow and it was very fat.
- 5 He said: "I will give this cow to the one who catches my word."
- 6 He travelled from market to market and beat (i.e. launched) proverbs (but) no one knew how to respond.
- 7 He took the cow in order to return home.
- 8 Having completed the tour around the village markets, he had not found the one who could defeat him.
- 9 He travelled far away (but still) he did not find the one who could defeat him.
- 10 On his way home, he saw a compound.
- 11 He realized that he was very thirsty and wanted to drink.
- 12 He said (to himself): "I will enter and drink there."
- 13 He entered and saw a child who was sleeping in the ashes.
- 14 He said: "Ah, nobody is here, just a small child sleeping in the ashes. I want to drink."
- 15 The child got up and said: "(But) here is someone!"
- 16 (The man) said: "(If) there is someone, he shall give me something to drink."
- 17 (The child) got up and took the calabashes, lined them up around

<sup>36</sup> For a *byali*-transcription see appendix 3.



the water pot and scooped the water.

- 18 (The man) said: "Child, I ask for something to drink (and) you  
scoop water like that?"
- 19 (The child) said: "Stranger, you don't know the customs of this  
household.
- 20 My mother was the first one to pour some water into the pot, my  
god-mother was the second one to pour some water into the pot.
- 21 To get the water which my mother has poured into the pot, I  
have to first skim off the water which my god-mother has poured  
into it.
- 22 If I don't do it, (my mother) will punish me when she comes  
home."
- 23 "*magəra!*", (the man said), "Where is your father?"
- 24 "Yesterday, when my father returned from the forest, he hit  
something (on the road)."
- 25 It was late, he did not apologize.
- 26 This morning he has returned (to the place) in order to  
apologize.
- [...]
- 32 (The man) said: "Indeed, I do not know how to respond.
- 33 You can take the cow."

Rueful about his loss, the 'master of all *kwankyama*' is on his way home when he eventually meets a warthog. The malicious animal promises him to regain the cow on condition that he carries it back to the compound. Meanwhile the child, who has foreseen this development, instructs his father to beat the ashes when he spots the wanderers, pretending to punish the child for the poor reward he had received for all the wisdom he, the father, had taught him. He acts as told, and when the two – man and warthog – approach the compound they hear the child crying that the father should stop his punishment since there he was, the man which had fobbed him off with a lousy cow. He would carry with him a warthog, intended to augment the reward. Having caught these words, the warthog jumps off the man's shoulder and disappears in the bush. The man has definitely lost his cow.

In a group discussion which took place some weeks after the recording in another village, local critics were asked to interpret and explain the tale. The answers are instructive not only with regard to the reasons for the man's defeat,

but also in terms of the indigenous theory about the rhetorical value and the operating mechanism of a *kwankyamə*.

#### 5.2.1.1. Insolence and hypocrisy

EY: “Dans un village, il n’y a pas de femme qui puisse enfanter l’enfant le plus intelligent du monde. Il ne faut pas montrer sa connaissance à tout le monde. C’est l’orgueil qui a fait qu’il a été vaincu par un simple enfant.” (1996, II: 62-66)

As noted earlier on, the tradition of *kwankyamə* is closely associated with intelligence. The skilful use of proverbs is thus a welcome means to evince mental faculties. Now, according to EY, it is neither the fact of disposing of these gifts nor their display in verbal interaction which are reprehensible, but the fact that the man boasts of them in a most unbecoming and provocative way (“l’orgueil”). Not only does he claim that he was *the* brightest person of the world (“le plus intelligent du monde”), but he also makes his cleverness an issue in itself by challenging everyone else to compete with him (“montrer sa connaissance à tout le monde”). This attitude violates the most basic principles of Berba ethics, according to which it is unseemly to show off one’s personal talents instead of waiting for them to be recognized and praised by others (see chapter 2). Moreover, he perverts the functions of a genre which should ideally be put to the service and not to the shame of others. Given this triple failure, it is only consequent that the man would be defeated in the end and lose his cow. Other than being a parable for moral deficiencies, the story also provides a ready illustration of the ‘power of the word’.

#### 5.2.1.2. Truth and metaphorical action: the nature of the proverb master’s defeat

In line 32 the master admits his defeat with the words “Indeed, I do not know how to respond to this saying.” Having heard the tale for the first time, I was intrigued by the fact that the child’s nonsensical, if not absurd answers should silence the master of proverbs and hence inflict a victory over him. I asked two elderly critics for an explanation:

AC: "Est-ce que l'enfant dit la vérité ou est-ce qu'il ment?"

KY: "L'enfant ment. Mais quand même, il sait que l'eau qui est déjà mélangée ne peut pas être séparée."

NK: "Ce que l'enfant vient de dire c'est une forme de *kwankyamə* exagéré. Et le maître ne pouvait pas lui demander toutes les explications d'autant plus qu'il ne s'y attendait pas. C'est normal que l'enfant dise que l'eau de sa mère et celle de sa marraine soient mélangées et il faille décanter l'eau de sa propre mère pour servir le maître. C'est vraiment paradoxal pour lui (*bwolə pwei* = son cœur a couru), car, pour l'enfant, il faut quelque chose terre-à-terre mais quelque chose qui, en même temps, peut le vaincre. On sait que les *kwankyamə* ne sont pas des images qui courent et qu'on peut arrêter. Sur eux le maître ne peut rien. C'est une abstraction (*ningə hira m pa fi bə mweiga* = something that you cannot hold onto or touch)."

What renders the 'master of all *kwankyamə*' speechless? NK provides the answer when he describes the (speech) act as a "forme de *kwankyamə* exagéré". What does that mean? An exaggeration, we have learned in the first chapter, denotes anything which 'goes beyond the norm' and, as such, is suspect if not despicable. A *kwankyamə*, in turn, is defined as a (meaningful) analogy. It now becomes clear why the action of the child is classified as a sub-class of an exaggerated *kwankyamə*: given the 'excessive' (since presumptuous and inappropriate) claim to have the brightest mind on earth, the only means to defeat him is by confronting him with an equally exaggerated response. It takes its most spectacular form right at the beginning, when the child sets out to separate his mother's water from that of his god-mother. As KY emphasizes, the child is aware of the fact that mixed water cannot be separated. Yet, this is exactly what the child has in mind: to exaggerate, i.e. to pretend to do the impracticable and by that to parallel the impossibility of the man's conduct. What causes his speechlessness is the 'fit' of the parabolic action and the moral truth of its message (i.e. 'recognize the indecency of your conduct and change it accordingly'). As a result, the master of proverbs does not find an adequate response and is deprived of his principal weapon, the word. Critics use vivid

terms to describe this very moment: in spite of all efforts, however hard the master tries to summon his energy and think up an answer (“son cœur a couru”), there is no way to invalidate the imagery, stop it from eluding him (“images qui courent”) and pin it down by a scathing reply. Yet to be confronted with a metaphorical reflection of his behaviour is not the only source of embarrassment for the boaster. His is shamed in another way, namely by the exemplariness of the child’s conduct. The child faces two conflicting requirements: on the one hand, a criticism is not only justified, but also needed in order to re-orient the man towards the line of expected behaviour. On the other hand, however, it is considered inappropriate for a child (who holds the lowest status in Berba society) to rebuke an adult either in an outspoken manner or by drawing on the prestigious proverb tradition (pretentious). Yet, this is exactly what he would have to do if he was to inflict a defeat upon a proverb speaker; for a witty saying can only be defeated by an equally witty reply. The tricky task is thus to find something “‘terre-à-terre’ mais quelque chose qui, en même temps, peut le vaincre.” And the child succeeds. What he comes up with is metaphorical *behaviour* (17-22) paralleling the man’s indecency with speech and action.<sup>37</sup>

#### 5.2.2. Open aggression

The second category of *kwankyamə pə su* comprises those proverbs which are counterproductive in a more straightforward sense. There is no doubt about their intended message. Speakers deploy them in order to offend and attack others, in a way which bears little relation to the matter at hand. What is shocking is the fact that one of a *kwankyamə*’s main assets, its capacity to minimize friction by allusion, has been perverted and used for negative ends.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Compare this with the notion of ‘proverbial action’, a phenomenon observed in the Akan proverb tradition. A viewpoint can be expressed subtly, by deliberately violating cultural norms, such as dress codes (Yankah 1989a: 102).

<sup>38</sup> The notion of ‘inappropriateness’ is very much a matter of discretion. It is determined by three factors: the intelligence of the listener and his ability to disclose the intended meaning, differences in individual value systems, and the audience’s estimation of the speaker’s intention (e.g. whether or not a flaw was deliberate). The speaker faces a double risk: if he underestimates the intelligence of his audience and hence uses a very simple proverb, they may feel ridiculed or at least dismiss it as of

Having stated a twofold dimension of quality in the tradition of proverb speaking, linguistic and moral, the notion of skill consequently pertains to two kinds of competence: Firstly, *proverb* competence and secondly, *social* competence.

## **6. The skills of a proverb speaker**

### **6.1. Proverb competence**

It includes

a) the disposal of a stock of proverb texts and the familiarity with their meaning and their standard contexts of use. In the words of a critic:

BK: "Il faut connaître beaucoup de proverbes et savoir dans quelles circonstances il faut les employer. Certains utilisent des proverbes sans connaître leurs explications réelles. Ils les donnent parce qu'ils les ont entendus quelque part." (Int. 25/ 03/96).

b) *analogic* competence, denoting the skilful and creative use of the genre in a given speech context. It includes text and context sensitivity as well as the capacity to decode and compose new *kwankyamə*. It is inextricably linked to the first aspect. Only a sound knowledge of popular proverbs and an understanding of their operating mechanism puts the speaker in the position to take a more creative approach and try to shape and deploy new analogies according to the basic principles of proverb use.

Given these characteristic elements of proverb competence, there are three main qualities which are required of the proverb speaker: a good memory, an analytical and imaginative mind (intelligence) and a certain interest in the tradition of *kwankyamə*.

---

minor quality. If, on the contrary, he expects too much and deploys complex metaphors with a minimum of interpretative clues, they may accuse him of hypocrisy.

#### 6.1.1. Good memory

To be quick with a witty reply, it is advisable to build up a substantial stock of *kwankyamə* which can instantly be retrieved if the situation arises. This inventory includes not only commonly known and newly invented sayings, but also undigested imagery which provides the 'raw material' for the composition of new proverbs.

TY: "...ce n'est pas n'importe qui, qui fait ce travail. Nous sommes en train d'expliquer ces proverbes. C'est sûr que certains *oublieront la moitié* de ce qu'ils ont entendu aujourd'hui. Par contre d'autres *garderont tout en mémoire*." (Int. 25/03/96).

#### 6.1.2. Intelligence

A certain degree of intelligence is required to master the analogic mechanism of a *kwankyamə*. Without it, the speaker will not be able to conduct the various operations necessary to bring the proverb and context situation together in a meaningful relationship, that is to say: assess the context situation as to its logical properties, compare the findings with one's own view, translate the conclusion into an analogy which not only describes but also insightfully comments on the context situation, incorporate the proverb in the main text, all the while adjusting the speech to the (assumed) intellectual faculties of the addressee. In describing this quality, two critics remark:

BK: "Celui qui sait bien réfléchir donne un bon proverbe" (Int. 08/06/95)

NK: "[...] quelqu'un qui donne des proverbes ne connaît pas ses qualités. C'est inhérent, spontané. C'est une manière de transcender un problème (*də nwanu a ntem dwenkende ninsi bæ twaku si hyahe hyahe*)." (Int. 25/03/96)

While BK describes the speaker's faculty in rather general terms as 'thinking well', NK attempts a more precise definition, characterizing it as a way of 'transcending'. It is an innate quality ("inhérent"), which manifests itself in the

fact that it takes the speaker only split seconds (“spontané”) to discern the logical properties (“transcender”) and conduct the transfer process.

The close association between intelligence and proverb use brings us to another aspect which, although only indirectly linked with the notion of quality assessment, is nonetheless vital for a thorough understanding of the tradition of proverb use. So far, we have taken the perspective of a critical audience which judges the deployment of *kwankyamə* in verbal interaction. From the point of view of the speaker, different reasons may motivate the use of proverbs:

NK: “Quand on se dispute, on veut prouver son intelligence. On veut vaincre l’autre en parlant.”

The victory is explained as follows:

NK: “Il sait bien s’adresser à toi. Tu dois réfléchir beaucoup avant de répondre. Et tandis que toi, tu parles directement, et tu ne peux plus débattre avec lui.” (Int. 26/05/95)

“Il sait bien t’adresser” hints at the compelling force of a *kwankyamə*, deriving not only from the graphic manner of making a persuasive statement, but also from the fact that it evinces a proposition’s truth. The wit, required to apply this code, renders it a superior mode of speaking compared to plain talk (“tu parles directement”). Hence, to defeat the speaker and prove himself equal, the addressee has to adopt the same code. If he sees no chance of winning the verbal duel, he will have to renounce further discussion and admit his defeat (“tu ne peux plus débattre”). If, however, he takes up the challenge, he must activate all his wit in order to produce an equally compelling response (“tu dois réfléchir beaucoup”). Apart from conducting the necessary transfers in order to de-code the saying of his counterpart, he has to en-code his own point of view. The limiting factor is the time it takes to think up the response. Viewed in this light, it comes as no surprise that the genre *kwankyamə* is estimated as a powerful weapon in a heated debate:

AC: "Pourquoi est-ce qu'on donne des proverbes?"

DN: "Des fois, c'est à cause du manque de respect envers toi. Il te traite comme un petit [...] c'est pour ne pas dire des mots qui choquent. Là, tu essaies de lui donner des proverbes pour lui montrer qu'il est petit devant toi. Si c'était ton égal, tu saurais comment lui parler." (Int. 26/05/95)

#### 6.1.3. Interest

A third precondition for the acquisition of proverb competence is a certain interest in the genre:

TY: "C'est celui, qui s'intéresse aux proverbes qui les maîtrise."  
(Int. 25/03/96)

#### 6.1.4. Acquisition of proverb competence

Having noted the different qualities of a skilled proverb speaker, the problem remains how proverb competence is acquired.

##### 6.1.4.1. Play

First of all, there are those occasions where people playfully train their analogic competence and learn to carefully observe their environment. It helps to assess the worth and meaning of a new *kwankyamə* and to build up a stock of metaphors and maxims. In particular three 'training fields' can be noted: they are, firstly, riddle sessions which are greatly popular amongst children and adults. Their major attraction is the intellectual challenge that goes with asking and guessing new riddles. It encourages the listeners to carefully examine the surroundings and search for analogous features. Secondly, there are instances of children 'playing' with proverbs in a manner comparable to riddling:

KY: "Proverbes – c'est un amusement et un jeu aussi. Il y a des enfants qui se regroupent. Ils lancent des proverbes et des autres répondent. Ceux-ci leur lancent des proverbes aussi et les autres cherchent. C'est une forme de devinette." (Int. 06/05/95)



MS: “La malice des enfants commence dès qu’ils s’amusent entre eux. C’est cette malice qui leur permet souvent de moduler les choses en imitant des images réelles.” (*ninsi ningə yo yosi* = things which are not real, also ‘play’) (Int. 25/03/96)

In the eyes of MS, this play is a valuable exercise to carefully observe the environment (“images réelles”) and become watchful and quick-witted (“malice”). (An example of playful proverb use amongst children is provided in appendix 4).

#### 6.1.4.2. Discursive speech contexts

Another form of acquiring proverb competence is training *in situ*, by attending those occasions which are prone to yield proverbs such as public assemblies, litigation sessions, but also private discussions:

MS: “Celui qui n’assiste pas régulièrement à des réunions pareilles n’aura pas la même compréhension dans le domaine que celui qui y participe.” (Int. 25/03/96)

Other than simply observing and imitating the use of *kwankyamə*, the initiation into the practice of this genre can also take a more explicit form, by asking more experienced proverb speakers for help and advice:

DN: “...si quelqu’un t’a donné un proverbe et que tu n’arrives pas à le découvrir, ce n’est pas à lui de te l’expliquer. C’est à toi d’aller chercher n autre vieux pour demander (la solution). Tu demanderas: “Vieux, celui-ci m’a dit cela. Qu’est-ce que cela veut dire?” Et le vieux t’explique ce que cela veut dire.” (Int. 26/05/95)

While it is uncommon to ask for the explanation of a proverb’s meaning in an ongoing debate – not only would it evince linguistic deficiency but also interrupt the flow of conversation – it is perfectly acceptable to do so afterwards and seek enlightenment from more experienced proverb users. It is this gradual initiation plus a growing experience, which will sooner or later enable the talented speaker to handle the genre more creatively and coin new sayings:

SK: "Si ce n'est pas un vieux qui t'a conseillé tu ne peux pas les inventer seul. Parce que c'est en raison de ton expérience avec d'autres proverbes que tu peux inventer." (Int. 13/05/95).<sup>39</sup>

#### 6.1.4.3. Playful proverb use

Another practice is that of playful proverb use, whether it occurs as art for art's sake or in a conversational speech context, yet with a playful intent. Such occasions not only offer a welcome opportunity to demonstrate cultural competence, but also serve as a training ground for verbal skills, which may be put to use in different and more 'serious' speech contexts. Two examples may illustrate this practice. The first one is drawn from a proverb contest, a verbal game, which is mainly enjoyed amongst male elders. It is a very casual speech event.<sup>40</sup> While sitting together under a shed and chatting over a good calabash of millet beer, on the occasion of a feast or a market day, one speaker may want to give the conversation a playful turn and start 'asking' proverbs. Provided the others are willing to join in, they will attempt to respond in a way that shows off their competence by suggesting a (standard) context situation, by comparing and contrasting it with other sayings and exploring its expressive potential by dwelling on selected aspects of its literal and applied meaning. Once the participants feel that the proverb has been exhaustively 'answered', someone else will ask a proverb and the round starts again. A *kwankyamə* may also trigger off a general discussion on cultural or moral issues, in which case the notion of proverb competence becomes secondary. In the following part I will

---

<sup>39</sup> It would be interesting to compare the Berba conception of proverb use with those of differently structured societies. I am thinking of E. Albert's (1964) account of Burundi rhetoric, where proverbs are exploited by subordinates to 'lie' to superiors, i.e. to flatter or embellish a speech in order to negotiate an improvement of one's own condition. Persuasion or elucidation seem not to be of primary concern in this society which disposes of an executive force and a clear distribution of power.

<sup>40</sup> In earlier days it seems to have been played on a large scale. An elder recalls: "Au temps de nos parents il y avait ça aussi. Un vieux faisait *daam* (i.e. millet beer), invitait une groupe des personnes d'ailleurs et de son milieu, des personnes qui connaissaient des proverbes. On leur dit qu'ils vont rester part à part. Certains parlent de tel problème, en présentant un proverbe. Quand ils finissent ils se croient des vainqueurs. Et les autres de là-bas parleront aussi pour annuler ce que les autres avaient dit. Comme une compétition. Pour l'amusement. Tu dis: "Voilà telle chose." Et l'autre dit: "Non, c'est plutôt comme ça." Jusqu'à trouver le clan, qui est un peu fort." (Int. DN 12/02/ 92).

present two sequences of a proverb contest which had been held at my request on 20 January 1992 in the village of Kotari.

Sequence I:

(I: 1)

NT:

- 1     *"A person who has climbed the tree and hasn't been able to pick the fruits won't be able to do so either, if he descends."*

YS:

- 2     *"This proverb is comparable to someone who has cultivated his field and the field hasn't yielded (a good harvest) and the following year he won't work on that piece of land (again), since he has lost once.*  
3     *And it is often said: "A loss is a lesson." "*

MS:

- 4     *"Kyansi's proverb is comparable to a hunter, who has failed to hunt (kill) and who (as a result) is very upset.*  
5     *Yet, perhaps he would have killed (an animal), if he had tried a another time.*  
6     *This is why one says: *Patience is (brings) good luck.**  
7     *As far as I understand, if the guy had made some efforts when he had been up the tree, he would have been able to pick some fruit, if he had descended and decided from some distance what he wanted to have."*

The situation depicted in proverb (line 1) – a popular saying – imparts clear advice: if you have not been able to accomplish your goal under ideal circumstances (= being on top of the tree), you will have no more success when you try again under worse conditions. YS obviously approves of the truth of the situation and the verity of its advice, and provides a hypothetical context situation to demonstrate the proverb's applicability: a man, having cultivated a field for one year without success, will spare his efforts and make no further attempt to work on the same piece of land the following year (2). As comparisons with other proverb discussions reveal, this is a standard explanation which points to the saying's most common context of use. A popular maxim (3) concludes the statement, which is drawn from (2) and, at the

same time, represents the abstract equivalent to (1). Yet, as the following comment shows, the approval is not unanimous. Starting from an analogous set situation – a hunter who has missed the game in the first place (4) – MS contemplates alternative options and comes to a different conclusion. Instead of giving up, he argues, it would be worth another try (5). Like in (3) he puts his conclusion in the form of an abstract maxim (6). In a circular turn, he proves the truth and value of his conclusion by successfully applying it to the set situation of the initial proverb (1).

#### Discussion:

The sequence illustrates two points: First, a proverb contest offers a good opportunity to demonstrate the mastery of and acquaintance with a wide range of different proverbs, metaphorical (1) or abstract (3 and 6), their various meanings and standard contexts of use (2). A common practice is to produce the poetic equivalent to the literal comment on the initial proverb (3 to 2 and 6 to 5). Analogic competence, in turn, becomes readily apparent in the way in which *kwankyame* and hypothetical context situations are meaningfully related to each other, explaining, validating or commenting on each other. Secondly, the popularity of a proverb is no warrant for its unanimous acceptance. People may take a critical stance towards its ‘verity’ and dismiss it on the ground of contradictory evidence or personal convictions. Unlike YS, MS does not subscribe to the idea of giving up after one single failure, since it might have been due to singular unlucky circumstances (“perhaps he would have killed the animal if he had tried another time”). Instead, he suggests waiting until conditions have improved and trying again. As the following table shows, the divergent views results from a different evaluation of the set situation:

(A)	(B)
climbing up tree: unable to pick fruit	hunting: unable to catch game
evaluation: no chance	evaluation: confidence, hope for another chance
(implied) advice: learn from your failure: do not try again	advice: do not give up, try again

What the sequence also illustrates is the practice of exploiting a hypothetical context situation as a source of evidence to affirm or disprove the truth of the literal meaning and, with it, the applicability of the proverb. While (2) corroborates the truth of both the literal and applied level of (1), (6) serves the opposite function of controverting (1).

Sequence II:

(I: 46)

GS:

- 1     *"A good tree will never yield bad fruits, as the bad tree will never yield good fruits."*

NT:

- 2     *"The cotton might scratch you more than sangi (thorny plant), which means: an honest man, simple and gentle, might bring forth a thief."*

TY:

- 3     "There are things which we frequently encounter in life, and it is due to our bad conduct (that we encounter them).  
4     Sometimes your wife tells you the name of the father of your child, although you've believed that it was your (own) child."

YK:

- 5     "It will be this child who brings disorder to your family, since his mother has already revealed that you are not his father.  
6     It is due to this fact that she (i.e. the young daughter) does what she likes.

GS (in referring to 1):

- 7     A man of good conduct will always have a child which adopts his father's (exemplary) behaviour, whereas the child of someone of bad conduct will adopt his bad conduct as well.  
8     At that time, who could educate the other?  
9     A thief cannot educate his child, since, once you have stolen, how can you educate your child, when you have stolen while he was growing up?"

TY:

- 10    "It is said that someone who was mean or loved to fight in his childhood will push his child to become the same."

YK:

- 11 “The ways of bringing up a child are different depending on the families.
- 12 In some families the children grow up without eating any meat, whereas other families give their children meat, which means: a child will be raised in the way in which his parents have been raised.”

GS:

- 13 “To raise someone means that it is better to teach him how to fish instead of serving him some fish, since knowing how to fish will enable him to feed himself throughout his life, whereas giving him some fish provides him with nothing but the food of a single day.”

TY:

- 14 “It is better to show someone how to construct a road than to tell him that you have (already) begun to construct one.”

YK:

- 15 *“The young man obtains the things of his youth whilst the elder receives those of the old age.*
- 16 *If a fisherman says that he doesn't care about the river, the river also says that he doesn't care about the fisherman.”*

NT:

- 17 *“The elder is pleased with his fortune, while the youngster is pleased with his youth.”*

The initial proverb (line 1) is the reformulated and elaborated version of the bible saying: “You recognize the tree by its fruit”, meaning that the nature of a descendant (‘good fruit’) allows for infallible conclusions on the nature and identity of his progenitor (‘good tree’). The immediate reaction is rather critical; it comes along in an extremely dense, witty way as a newly coined *kwankyama* (2). By drawing on the same trope (flora), NT compares two plants and their characteristics, thereby both corroborating and undermining the proposition of (1). *sangi* is a thorny plant. Thus, it can be expected to scratch since it is part of its nature to do so. The analogy reads ‘thorn : nature of plant :: child : progenitor’ what in turn corresponds to (1). The analogy is contrasted with a

second image, which displays opposite characteristics and thus undercuts the notion of infallibility in evidence. Cotton, commonly associated with ultimate softness, might cause even greater harm than *sangi* due to the rough surface of its outer hull. The image evinces two things: offspring can greatly differ from their progenitor – the fruit of the cotton plant combines two opposite qualities, utmost gentleness and greatest harm. Consequently, it is wrong to generalize that one could *infallibly* conclude either way from parents to children and from children to parents. To validate his proposition, NT concludes his metaphor with a (hypothetical) context situation it can usefully be applied to. In (3-4) TY, by switching from poetic speech to prose, critically reflects NT's proposition and seeks to rehabilitate (1). To reconcile the undeniable empirical evidence of a child differing from his father with the initial idea of a seemingly conduct transmitted from father to child, he introduces the idea of adultery: adultery allows for two parallel conceptions of fatherhood, one nominal, the other physical. It is thus a fitting concept to embrace divergent facts. With this clever move, he corroborates (1) in a double way: Not only does the notion of hereditary qualities remain untouched, but it is moreover explained and affirmed by the moral corruption which is directly transmitted from the physical father (the adulterer) to his depraved child. In (7-9) the meaning of (1) is subsequently expounded, whereby the main argument of 'determinism' shifts from a genetic predisposition towards upbringing (exploitation of an old example of a thief and honest father). In (11-12) YK dwells on the idea of a different education and illustrates it with the example of meat-eating. This leads to a further digression (12), in which GS explores the concept of education in general. In drawing on the example of fishing, he argues that a sensible education was practice-oriented, and providing the child with skills, instead of material goods. TY reiterates this idea, though in a reformulated and linguistically more refined way (14). (15-16) reflects pedagogic principles from still another point of view. In two subsequent *kwankyame* YK raises the problem of tensions between the generations. He points to the difficulty of conveying advice to younger people, who display different interests and attitudes towards life (15). In drawing on the *topos* of fishing, he notes a certain resignation on the part of the educating

parent (16). (17) concludes the sequence by affirming (15) and listing distinct values according to a different age.

### Discussion:

The comprehensive sequence is illuminating in several respects: Firstly, it illustrates how analogic competence is trained and displayed in the course of a proverb contest. (1-2) is a striking example in this regard. With a response that is poignant and nuanced at the same time, the speaker supplies ready proof of his verbal wit and his mastery of the analogic mechanism. To produce such a statement he first has to comprehend the proverb situation in (1) which is new to him, secondly, deduce the piece of advice contained in the proverb and compare it to his own conviction, and thirdly, search for a fitting metaphor which expresses his attitude and comments on the initial *kwankyamə*. In the present case, the speaker displays a double analogic competence by answering a *kwankyamə* unknown to him with an equally new saying. Analogic competence is also reflected in the playful use of templates such as (13-14) 'it is better to...than' as a template for abstract maxims and the (15-17) juxtaposition 'A does/ prefers a, while B does/ prefers b' for metaphorical analogies. In formulating examples based on standard templates, the speaker trains his skill in coining new proverbs, since the logical relationships between different properties and classes have been thought through in advance. It is a valuable exercise which prepares for the creative use of verbal material, such as the quick adjustment of an image to the background of experience of the speech partner. Additionally, the precision of images and their reformulating in more poignant ways (13-14) illustrates how the potential of an image is explored and eventually leads to coinage of a new *kwankyamə*. Another facet of analogic competence is the play with *topoi* and tropes and the exploration of their potential for meaning (13-16).

The second observation concerns the playful exploration of the argumentative value of a *kwankyamə*. It derives from the abstract principle which, contained in the proverb situation, touches on social and moral issues and is therefore predestined to express a personal view of a certain subject.



a) As the verbal exchange clearly shows, abstract principles and metaphors are ascribed the same conversational value as ordinary language. They are treated as arguments in their own right, ready to criticize, undermine or substantiate a certain point.

b) In concluding or generalizing from an image (consecutive particles 'which means' (12) and 'since' (13)) the practice of exegesis is trained in which a speaker explains and justifies the truth of a proposition or the appropriateness of an image.

c) Another important aspect concerns the function context or proverb situations as sources of evidence. In the sequence we find a whole range of imagery, arguments, parabolic sketches etc. which are continually related to and contrasted with each other. Apart from testing the truth value of a proverb situation, the speaker realizes that the context and the proverb situation mutually validate each other. This knowledge may serve him well in more 'serious' circumstances, such as a litigation session or a political debate, when the need arises to improve the persuasive value of an argument.

While a proverb contest is revealing in that the playful deployment of allusive language takes place in a 'context free' environment, i.e. in a situation where the genre itself is to the fore and speakers can freely associate and explore its expressive potential, we also find another kind of playful proverb use in which a clearly defined framework directs and delimits the interpretation of the proverbs. The challenge here rests with the speaker's wit and imagination to produce an original image, to explore and elaborate different tropes in reference to the same motif. To illustrate this kind of proverb practice I will cite from a verbal duel between a young man and a young woman recorded at the market in the village of Toussari on 6 October 1992.

G(irl): "[1] *According to the elders, it is the hens of the same race which find themselves together in the same chicken coop.*"

M(an): "But what would you say if a foreign hen came – what would you say to it?"

G: “[2] *If you eat the fruits of a high tree, you have to thank the wind.*” (meaning: thanks to the founder of the market that we have met).”

[...]

G: “Would you be able to support me?”

M: “If you take me, I will support you.”

G: “You know how to kill hens but you don’t know how to raise them!”

M: “[3] *The frog which swims in the water attributes to himself the importance of a hippopotamus.*”

G: “If you like eating eggs, then guard a hen in your bag and any time you want to eat, you can take it out and eat! Do not take me like a mouse on the roof!” (meaning: a man cannot simply take her home and then not love her any more and mistreat her, so that she is obliged to steal her food like a mouse on the roof).”

M: “If you behave well at home, I will not treat you like a mouse.”

G: “[4] *The healer who has only got one single remedy complains that he is not compensated sufficiently!*”

M: “Me, I have several forms of remedies. An aching stomach – I can heal it, hurting kidneys – I can heal them, hurting knees – I can heal them (meaning: even if you refuse me, there are still other women to court).”

## 6.2. Social competence

While proverb competence is indispensable to mastering the linguistic imperatives of proverb use, it is social competence which is required to meet the criterion of ‘appropriateness’. By social competence I mean the way in which a speaker interacts with his speech partners and complies with the rules governing verbal conduct, amongst them the request to share one’s insights with others and to avoid or settle conflicts. In this view, apposite proverb use is not only a question of good memory and intelligence, but also a question of the *context sensitivity* and *moral disposition* of the speaker, his ability to assess the mood

of his audience, estimate their capability of comprehension; to sense animosities at an early stage and quickly react to ease the tension and avoid future conflicts; to deliver criticism in an indirect and cognitively and aesthetically appealing way to save the face of others in public and make it easier to accept and follow good advice; and, finally, to never leave doubt about one's good will and the intention to act in the interest of the addressee and the well-being of the community. Given this emphasis on moral adequacy in verbal conduct, it comes as no surprise that the quality of *yamfumə* should be one of the principal attributes of well thought of proverb speaker:

IY: "(Quelqu'un qui donne des proverbes) doit être *yamfumə*."

AC: "Pourquoi?"

IY: "Parce que celui-ci garde longtemps les propos d'autrui et fait des comparaisons avec sa propre vie." (Int. 25/03/96)

Being *yamfumə*, gentle and even-tempered, allows the speaker to control his tongue, to attentively listen to the propositions of others ("garde longtemps les propos d'autrui") and respond in a mindful and persuasive way, to generously overlook eventual aggressions and encourage a peaceful debate.

## **7. Summary of chapters 4 and 5**

The investigation of the two oral literary genres of storytelling and proverb speaking have yielded the following results: The notion of 'quality' in the tradition of storytelling is predicated essentially upon structural aspects, namely clarity and consistency. Without them, it will be hard to procure an aesthetic experience, such as the enjoyment of the pattern of 'tension-release' or the cognitive satisfaction through an interesting plot or an insightful conclusion. The demands on the speaker and his narrative skills follow accordingly. They involve the memorizing and adequate (re)production of a tale template and a direct and lucid wording. As far as the proverb tradition is concerned, the notion of quality centres around referential-functional aspects. A 'good' proverb is distinguished by its truth value on the literal and applied level and serves, on

the functional level, the double exigency of elucidation and allusion. For the speaker's skills it follows that he has to dispose of an ample stock of proverbs, master the analogic mechanism and exhibit a certain degree of social competence, if he is to succeed in verbal interaction.

With these findings in mind, let us now turn to the final part of the investigation: the examination and evaluation of speech behaviour in a political debate.

## Chapter VI: Quality and skill in a political debate – a case study

### 1. Introduction

The aim of the present chapter is twofold: first of all, it is intended to illustrate the findings of the chapter on political rhetoric with the example of a public debate. Secondly, it serves to substantiate the thesis of an interconnectedness of different modes of speaking through (the observation of) recurrent linguistic patterns and evaluative concepts. A concluding paragraph will interpret the results in the light of individual language use.

The example is drawn from the recording of an assembly which was held on 31 January 1996 in the village of Kotari on behalf of the *groupement de puits*. The organisation is part of the *association de développement villagois (ADV)* and is in charge of the water management of the village. The assembly took place in the small courtyard in front of the local shop of Kotari, and lasted from seven until nine o'clock in the evening. It was composed of nine of a total of thirteen members of the *groupement*, including YS, the village head and president of the *groupement de puits*, and MS, the secretary of the association, who had initiated the debate.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the exposed situation of the meeting place invited numerous passers-by to sit down and follow the event, although none of them actually participated in it.

The investigation will concentrate on the first half of the meeting. At the heart of the analysis is an interview in which local critics attempt to evaluate selected parts (sequences) of the debate.<sup>2</sup> Their judgements are complemented and substantiated by textual evidence. To avoid tedious repetition, each sequence will be discussed in the light of one or at maximum two aspects which it

---

<sup>1</sup> Each village head presides over the ADV and with it automatically any group forming part of the village association.

<sup>2</sup> As far as the methodology is concerned, I have subdivided the first half of the speech event into fourteen sequences, each of which illustrated particularly well (at least in my opinion) certain aspects of speech behaviour. In the interview, which took place on 9 April 1996, the sequences were then successively played to a group of critics – six men and two women, aged between 20 and 60 years – who were asked to comment on linguistic features and quality. None of the critics had participated in the debate himself.

exemplifies particularly well. As far as the organisation of the chapter is concerned, the analysis will follow the course of the debate as it occurred on the day of the recording. Not only do I hope to convey a sense of the dynamics which characterize such a complex speech event but it is also of relevance for the notion of quality, since part of a speaker's skill consists of his ability to quickly adapt to the changing exigencies in an ongoing debate.

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. Sequence 1 (1-4)<sup>3</sup>

YS:

- 1 "Thank you very much for coming tonight.
- 2 We will listen to and try to understand each other.
- 3 It is our friend Mberma Sambieni, who contacted me tonight in order to suggest this assembly.
- 4 I owe him many thanks for the fact that he came to bring us together and to talk to us."

After all participants have taken their seat, YS, the village head (*délégué*), opens the debate with an introductory note (1-2), before presenting the author of the debate (3), to whom he expresses his gratitude (4).

#### Discussion:

In the indigenous view, YS' speech conforms to the rules of speech behaviour. It is the right and duty of a village head to introduce an assembly which is held on the village level.

NK: "[...] si moi, je tiens une réunion, j'invite le *délégué* en même temps. Au moment de l'introduction, je lui donne la parole. Après je vais prendre la parole pour enchaîner ma réunion. Après avoir fini l'introduction lui (le *délégué*) va aussi dire: "Ah, c'est celui-là qui nous a convoqué, écoutez-le!"

YK: "[...] si on convoque une réunion et que les gens sont venus nombreux, il faut les remercier."

---

<sup>3</sup> For a full transcription of the speech event see appendix 5.

As clearly emerges from those statements, the Berba regard the opening sequence as a formal act rather than a creative performance (as illustrated by the use of the imperative “il faut”). Despite its conventional character, however, it fulfils an important function as a framing device and leaves some scope for creative manipulation on the part of the speaker. In his second remark, for example, YS sets the tone by underlining the (assumed) will to collaborate and to listen to each other (“We will understand what everyone wants to say.”). This corresponds to one of the guiding maxims of political language, the maxim of co-operation. Moreover, by thanking both the audience for their attendance and the author of the debate for his initiative, YS highlights the *communal* effort and the mutual dependence of the individual members of the group, and positions himself as an equal amongst equals or *primus inter pares* at the most. In this way, a frame is established which not only provides an orientation to the expected behaviour but also defines the criteria against which the appropriateness of future speech behaviour is assessed.

## 2.2. Sequence 2 (5-19)

MS:

- 5 “As the *délegué* has just set out, I have called you together because of the following problems:
- 6 (Firstly), the pump.
- 7 Secondly, there has been an order to remove the sand from the last bridge.
- 8 Thirdly, various issues.
- 9 As far as the pump is concerned, we already sat together in the last rainy season.
- 10 We said: “We have to fight in order to arrange the well.”
- 11 There was nothing left in the cashbox.
- 12 That day we were talking about (this problem).
- 13 Yet we were under serious constraints because of our workload, (and) I said: “After the work (is done) we have to see how we can fill our cashbox.”
- 14 Now that we are sitting down together, we can discuss (this matter) and see how the expenses can be managed.
- 15 We have already sat together, and had to state, that, *yó*, the workload was very heavy and there was not any money left (for communal projects).

- 16 Everyone who was present had to go and see how to save some money.  
17 The rainy season is very close.  
18 This is the problem I have.  
19 If anyone wishes to say something (he may do so), (but) we can also move on to another point.”

MS takes the floor and introduces his discourse with a reference to his predecessor (5) before presenting the topics of the day (6-8). He then starts with the first point – the repair of the pump and its financing by public contribution – and briefly recalls the background of the problem (9-13 + 15-16). As he explains, the matter had already been debated at an earlier occasion. Yet, for several reasons, it had been impossible to reach a mutual decision and agree on the need for a subscription and the conditions for its collection. In referring to this negative experience (14), MS sets out how he envisages the course and outcome of the present event. What is required is a constructive debate. To affirm this view, he reiterates that no solution had been achieved in the past (15+16). Although clear from the text, the appeal itself takes an indirect form. It is implied by hinting at the approaching rainy season, indicating that if the problem is not resolved by the next rainy season, the same unfortunate conditions will frustrate their efforts, and jeopardize the water supply for the entire village (17).

#### Discussion:

Let us begin with the consideration of one of the principal means of ‘clarity’. I am referring here to framing devices which serve to anchor a speech in the dynamics of an ongoing debate and suggest cohesion and coherence on the level of the speech event. Linguistically, they can be described as meta-statements which mediate between text and context in both a prospect and retrospect function. In a prospect function we find turn-taking markers, which indicate the end of a contribution as in (18), or bridge over to the ensuing discourse as in (4) or (19). In each case, the purpose is to signal the closure of a text and authorize another speaker to take the floor. Introductory formulae, in turn, operate in a retrospect fashion by linking the current speech with a preceding one. The



Berba not only highly value this technique but also have clear ideas about its function in verbal interaction:

AC: "Souvent j'entends: "Je remercie celui qui vient de parler. Maintenant je voudrais bien aussi parler un peu." Est-ce que c'est bien...de démarrer comme ça, d'introduire sa propre parole ou est-ce qu'on peut commencer brusquement?"

NK: "C'est à cause de l'obéissance. Il faut obéir à certains, il ne faut pas les ignorer. C'est aussi pour encourager certains dans ce qu'ils ont dit."

AC: "Est-ce que tous les participants sont considérés comme des égaux ou est-ce que c'est uniquement le plus jeune qui doit remercier le plus vieux?"

NK: "Ça concerne tout le monde. Si on te remercie, ça veut dire que tu as bien parlé, tu as dit la vérité."

According to NK, there are good reasons to begin with a reference to a preceding contribution. First of all, etiquette requires showing one's respect ("obéissance") for people of a higher rank, such as an elder or a state official. It then serves to foster the course of a debate and confirm others in their view ("encourager"). And finally, it represents a good opportunity to express one's appreciation of a speech ("tu as bien parlé, tu as dit la vérité"). The fact that these judgements are not set phrases, but have a truly evaluative quality becomes clear from the following statement:

AC: "Mais est-ce qu'on va aussi remercier quelqu'un qui a menti, pour ne pas l'offenser?"

NK: "Si quelqu'un ment, on ne le remercie pas [laughter]. On va prendre la parole en disant: "Ce que celui-ci vient de dire, moi, je ne sais pas si c'est vrai ou pas."

The second aspect which is of interest to us concerns the structure of the text and techniques of persuasion. As it becomes clear from (13) and (17), MS sees the real danger in a further delay of the decision to repair the pump. It is hence

imperative to settle the matter as soon as possible. What are the means by which he tries to impart his conviction and urge the others to find a solution?

NK: "Il a donné l'ordre du jour; il a rappelé la décision qui a été arrêtée auparavant et qui n'a pas été exécutée. Maintenant il leur rappelle de trouver une solution...dans tout ce qu'il a dit, ce qu'il a résumé, il a bien parlé."

To NK it is the careful composition of the text, its division in facts/ premises ("il a donné l'ordre du jour") and conclusions ("leur rappelle de trouver une solution"), which accounts for the quality of the speech and lends it a persuasive force.<sup>4</sup> His view is corroborated by textual evidence:

- (9-13): premise (fact): summary of the past history of the problem
- (14): conclusion (defining the matter under discussion)
- (15-16): premise (fact): specification of reasons which account for the failure to make a decision in the past (rainy season with heavy work load)
- (17) premise (fact): approach of the next rainy season  
[conclusion implied in logical connection between (15-16) and (17): need for some effort]

What the breakdown also suggests is another technique, which can be described as a "technique of implicature". I am referring here to the last part of the speech where two premises (facts) in (15-16) and (17) are juxtaposed in such a way that the conclusion, and with it the intended message – the call for rapid action –, becomes perfectly obvious without it ever being explicitly mentioned. To convey an idea by means of implicature is an important rhetorical strategy, particularly when it contains a censure or an urgent appeal. By leaving it to the addressee to uncover the intended meaning, the speaker avoids appearing pushy or presumptuous. The listener is, on the contrary, afforded recognition and respect in the debate as an equal partner who is able to draw the respective

---

<sup>4</sup> Although the Berba hold that the practice of opening a meeting with a presentation of the main topics is an ancient tradition, it may also well be that it has been developed under the influence of western speech conventions (state administration, development projects).

conclusions by himself. Apart from complying with the requirement of indirectness, this technique may also have a positive effect on the realisation of ideas transmitted that way, for any insight will be regarded as one's own intellectual achievement and is thus more likely to be observed.

### 2.3. Sequence 3 (20-36)

YS:

- 20 "I've got something to say.  
21 At the assembly in Nodi in which we participated, Kwalebige [a  
local aid-worker] was there together with her brother  
[classificatory brother].  
22 As far as I know, I think that he had examined the pump once.  
23 When he examined it, he noticed that one piece was broken.  
24 He had been accompanied by a son of the Natemba  
[neighbouring ethnic group].  
25 Kwalebige remembered (this well) and said: "The piece is  
broken.  
26 How are we going to repair it?"  
27 (The Natemba) man said that he would go home.  
28 But he would come back another day and bring the piece with  
him and replace it.  
29 Kwalebige said: "But we don't know the price yet!"  
30 He said that he would bring the piece with him and tell us the  
price.  
31 That is why, if we don't make some effort and there is no money,  
when he arrives, there is nothing we can do, without money.  
32 "Haven't you seen the iron pulley they (had) repaired?  
33 I think it has dropped again and caused another hole in the iron."  
34 This is what he told us that day.  
35 We must try to get some money and collect, collect a bit.  
36 He will be back on the 12th of December."

YS takes over and justifies his intervention with a hint at the value of the following speech (20) before giving a detailed account of a past conversation between him, an *animatrice* (woman co-ordinator) of the development project A.C.O.R.D. and a mechanic from a nearby place, in which they discussed technical problems and set the conditions for the repair of the pump (21-34). He

concludes that it was high time to make some effort and prepare for the arrival of the technician by collecting the contribution (35-36).

#### Discussion:

NK: "... (dans) tout ce qu'il a dit, ce qu'il a résumé, il a bien parlé..."

As "ce qu'il a résumé" suggests, the appreciation of the speech is for the way in which the speaker relates a past encounter. How can we describe the characteristics of the speech? There is, first and foremost, the style of delivery. After a brief mention of the date and occasion, YS gives a meticulous account of the event, without, however, going into unnecessary detail. His focus is on the course of the debate, in which the conditions for the repair of the pump are set. Direct and reported speech respectively predominate, whereas personal remarks or any other kind of evaluative statements are lacking. Overall, the impression is that of an 'objective' report, accurate in its details and faithful to the facts. The value of this effect can only be fully estimated when we call to mind that the Berba still constitute a predominantly oral society. There is no media other than the spoken word. People therefore largely depend on eye and ear witnesses to learn of 'facts' and events which they have been unable to witness themselves. In light of this background, it becomes comprehensible why YS's speech is widely approved. With its straight, narrative style it comes close to the ideal of a witness report. The careful description and punctilious reproduction of the conversation (direct speech) enable the listener to visualize if not 're-live' the scene as if he had experienced it himself. This eye witness perspective, in turn, may leave him under the impression that his judgement comes from personal evidence and draws on 'facts'. In view of the egalitarian speech situation, the aspect of forming an 'independent' opinion is of considerable importance. From the speaker's point of view, the suggestion of objectivity has another advantage. Apart from backing up his reputation as credible and trustworthy, it also serves to validate the premises from which he draws his conclusions. In either case it can be used effectively to enhance the persuasive value of a speech.

#### 2.4. Sequence 4 (37-68)

NT:

- 37 "Tó, he has spoken well.
- 38 The elders say (with their mouth): [1] *"If your dog follows you on a hunting expedition, and it catches (something) and you give it neither bones nor innards, the following day, if it catches again and if it is an old dog it will eat everything itself.*
- 39 *If it comes back, you will say:*
- 40 *"My dog is a bad dog.*
- 41 *It catches but it eats everything itself."*
- 42 *Yet, it is you yourself, who eats, but you don't give it the bone.*
- 43 *You eat all the meat although you should throw the bone to it, but you don't."*
- 44 You say that it is just a dog.
- 45 Yet it is comparable to man.
- 46 I think that (it is justified to) say, that all of us, as we are sitting here, are missing the one, who encourages the work we are doing in this village.
- 47 The person, who should encourage us is the village head, and I disrespect him.
- 48 Why?
- 49 All of us who are present have set up the *groupement de puits* together as part of the AVD.
- 50 Right.
- 51 The village head should work together with the association.
- 52 Personally, I have noticed that the *bega* has left the village population alone, saying that they should work by themselves.
- 53 Why has the *bega* left the village population alone?
- 54 Having worked once or twice that way, the village won't be able to work like that a third time.
- 55 We have a village head who doesn't know his place.
- 56 The village knows that it has a head.
- 57 (Yet) it is he himself who doesn't know what a village head is.
- 58 Everything he has done and that doesn't work out is the fault of the village head and I criticize him for that.
- 59 You don't show us the (right) way(s).
- 60 *It is like you are the hunter and we are your dogs.*
- 61 *You encourage us and we catch, but you don't throw us a bone.*
- 62 *You eat, and you don't even throw the innards into the fire to give them to us.*
- 63 *The next day, if I return into the bush, I will eat there.*

- 64    *When I return, you will say: "My dog is not honest.*  
 65    *It catches things (but) it eats in the bush.*  
 66    *I will not even give it some millet porridge!"*  
 67    *(But) it depends on you who are strolling around.*  
 68    This is the end of the story of the dogs."

It is now NT, who takes the floor. Having expressed his gratitude to the preceding speaker (37), he somewhat unexpectedly switches the code and introduces a proverb with the formula "the elders say (with their mouth)" (38). What follows is an elaborate *kwankyamə* whose meaning is first explored on the literal level (38-43) before a transitional phrase (44) leads over to the painstaking exegesis of its applied meaning (49-63). After an acme in (58-59) a shifter (60) leads back to the initial imagery, which is repeated almost verbatim in (61-68). A concluding remark signals the end of both metaphor and speech.

#### Discussion:

NT has abruptly changed the topic. Instead of following up the issue of the pump, he launches into a sharp censure of the village head. To comprehend this sudden outburst and evaluate the speech in the given context, we have to know something more about the position of YS in Kotari and his relation with the members of the *groupement de puits*. Under very special circumstances YS was elected village head in 1986. Until then, TY, a rich farmer had held the office for more than 15 years. Thanks to a large family and a regular monetary income (a war veteran pension paid by the French Government) his position had been unusually powerful. Initially on good terms with the local population, the relationship deteriorated when he and his family began to abuse their strong position, demonstrating superiority and exerting pressure on others. Given the segmentary ethos with its emphasis on political equality, it was only a matter of time before people revolted and started working towards changing what, in their view, was an intolerable situation. Yet things were not that easy. According to local belief, TY's extraordinary power derived from *tibu*, a magic substance, which protected him against all forms of social sanction. The only way to get rid of him was by means of an orderly defeat in the upcoming democratic elections. Only by keeping to the rules – so to the underlying logic – would TY be

vulnerable since there was neither an obvious reason nor an immediate target to justify and direct the use of *tibu*. Nonetheless, the fear of the magic power was not entirely dispelled, and it became very difficult to find a suitable candidate who would stand against TY in the elections. In their despair, they finally managed to persuade YS – reputed to be honest, though phlegmatic – to accept nomination, reassuring him that there was nothing to fear. TY was indeed replaced, yet YS's particular nature soon turned out to be a real drawback for the community. His laziness and lacking sense of responsibility even gave one villager reason to fear: "Il veut détruire le village. C'est comme une lampe: si on l'éteint qu'est-ce qu'on peut trouver maintenant?" At the time when the research was conducted, the situation had further worsened and the dissatisfaction with and contempt for the village head reached a critical level. People began to boycott meetings, and to publicly criticize or ridicule the *délégué*. It is in the light of this background that we must view NT's speech and its evaluation by local critics, who approved of it as one of the most valuable contributions.

To understand this favourable judgement, we have to call to mind what constitutes quality in the use of political language. The principal evaluative criterion is the notion of 'constructiveness', which, in turn, splits up into two different aspects, namely constructiveness as regards the referential content, i.e. the degree to which a discourse contributes to the solution of a problem, and constructiveness in terms of speech behaviour, i.e. the degree to which a speaker complies with the governing rules of verbal interaction and renders a fruitful debate possible. Let us start with the first aspect and examine how Berba critics judge the message and intention of the speaker:

NK: "Ce que Tawema (i.e. NT) a dit, si j'avais été dans la réunion, je l'aurais remercié sincèrement avant de prendre la parole. Parce que j'avais eu en tête de dire la même chose, mais Tawema m'a avancé."

AC: "Alors il a bien parlé?"

(everyone): "Oui!"

YK: "Si vous êtes en cours de route et que votre guide se perd, tout le monde va se perdre. C'est ce que Tawema vient de dire. Sambieni (i.e. YS) est en train de perdre le chemin. C'est pourquoi toute la population du village risque de s'égarer."

The critics are unanimous in their approval. Their positive judgement is grounded on two reasons: first of all, NT has acted as a spokesman not only for the *groupement de puits* but also for the local community and expressed the general discontent with YS's performance in his duties as head of both ("j'avais eu en tête de dire la même chose"). Secondly, apart from a mere criticism, NT also attempts to counsel YS, to make him aware of the damaging effect of his negligence for the entire community ("le village va se perdre") and to hopefully persuade him of the need to change his behaviour. As the first counsellor of the village head and reputed to be one the wisest elders of Kotari he is entitled to do so:

NK: "Si tu n'es pas conseiller, si tu es jeune, tu ne peux pas lui parler comme ça. Mais si tu es plus âgé que lui [...] tu peux le conseiller en lui disant: "Le chemin que tu suis, c'est un mauvais chemin. Tu risques de nous égarer."

The critics' appreciation, then, is not only for the message itself, but also for the fact that the speaker has used his rank and authority to work towards an improvement of the present situation which is to the advantage of all (a secure water supply, more commitment on the part of the village head and better relations between him and the village population). He has acted in a socially appropriate way and his contribution therefore merits great esteem. Yet it is not the content alone which leads critics to judge the speech positively. The approval is also for the way in which the speaker accomplishes his task and launches a severe criticism without destroying the basis for any further constructive debate and the peaceful settlement of the problem. To fully appreciate NT's verbal competence and rhetorical skill, we must bear in mind that the question of appropriateness in speech behaviour depends on two sometimes conflicting factors: the nature of the intended message on the one hand, and the canon of speech conventions underpinning verbal interaction on



the other. As indicated above, NT's principal aim – apart from expressing general discontentment – is to induce a change of behaviour on the part of the *délégué* before the situation worsens, with the conflict escalating and jeopardizing both the work of the *groupement* and social peace in the village. In view of the superior rank of YS and the few means to put pressure on him, the most reasonable and effective way to achieve this goal is by means of persuasion, more specifically by persuasive argumentation.<sup>5</sup> YS must come to understand the more serious implications of his negligent attitude and recognize the need to change his conduct. In terms of language use, this demands, above all, the deployment of rhetorical devices which render the points of censure as perspicuous as possible. At the same time, however, this runs counter to another speech convention which requires just the opposite, namely indirect and allusive wording when launching an attack, however justified it may be. The fear is that any straightforward criticism is likely to aggravate existing conflicts or generate new ones, and thereby put at risk not only the present but also any future attempts to resolve problems in a constructive debate. The addressee – feeling offended by an overtly aggressive tone and embarrassed before the public – may either hit back or opt out. There are no means to force him back into the discussion. The aspect of social rank is an influential factor in this regard: the higher the position of the addressee, the more the speaker has to express himself cautiously. In the present case, NT, an elder himself, enjoys a much higher reputation and greater authority than YS. Nonetheless, YS remains NT's and the other villagers' representative (and who, moreover, has stood for this post at their request) and NT has to adjust his speech conduct accordingly. Compliance with the rules not only helps to get his message through to YS, but also augments his reputation as a *hirékya*, a grand elder, who acts in a perfectly appropriate and thus constructive way. As the following analysis reveals, NT's speech is indeed marked by the attempt to balance clarity, outspokenness and indirectness, and he deploys a wide range of different

---

<sup>5</sup> Other means include social sanctions (boycott, ridicule) or withdrawal, yet, people tend to delay these kind of responses as long as possible, since they risk operating in a counterproductive way and cementing a conflict instead of resolving it.

strategies to reconcile the conflicting goals of censure, persuasion and conflict prevention.

#### 2.4.1. Persuasion and clarity

The rhetoric of persuasion revolves around the ideal of neat argumentation whose force derives first from its inherent logic, i.e. the way in which its constituents (reasons/ premises and conclusions) are linked to each other, and secondly from the truth of its premises (for a discussion of the notion of 'truth' see chapter 3). NT employs several techniques to meet these requirements and enhance the persuasive value of his speech.

##### 2.4.1.1. Structure of the text/ argument

The sine qua non for the presentation of a cogent argument is a carefully structured text. Conclusions, facts and premises must be brought into a logical order, where the former can consistently be developed from the latter and which persuade the listener of the inevitability of the conclusion and the rightness of the argument. A close examination of the speech reveals the following structure:

#### Propositional unit:

#### Argumentative/ rhetorical function:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a) imagery (38)<br>(disobedient dogs)  | <u>reason I</u>  |
| b) exegesis of imagery on literal level<br>(39-43)<br>(ultimate fault/ cause for<br>disobedience rests with<br>hunter, who does not<br>encourage dogs) | <u>validation of reason I</u><br><br>analysis of problem in<br>proverb situation |
| c) transitional phrase (44)<br>(announcement of analogic transfer<br>concerning the term 'dogs')   | shifter  |

d) exegesis of imagery on applied level (49-62)	<u>reason II</u> (consideration of problem on a theoretical level, taking into account the opinion of the members of the association) subordinate argument <u>validation of reason II</u> <u>premise 1</u>
– ‘incumbency model’ (see below) (49-51) ( <i>délégué</i> should encourage group)	<u>reason 2</u>
– comparison of model with reality (52) ( <i>délégué</i> does not encourage group)	
– consequence (54) (future activity doubtful)	<u>conclusion 1</u>
– indirect attack (55 + 57-58) (who is responsible for the failure)	<u>conclusion 2</u>
e) direct attack (59) (introduction of YS in person; censure of his performance as a <i>délégué</i> )	<u>conclusion developed from reason I and II</u>
f) transitional phrase (64) (announcement of analogic transfer back to initial imagery, comprising both terms ‘dogs’ and ‘hunter’)	
g) repetition of imagery (60-67)	re-reading of the metaphor in the light of the applied meaning
h) closing formula (68)	closure of text and speech/ turn-taking marker

As readily emerges from the outline, NT attempts to persuade YS of the need to take his office seriously by presenting a carefully structured argument based on the pattern: reason/ premises – validation of their truth – conclusion. The reasoning is further strengthened by linguistic elements which occur as meta-statements and operate as devices of clarity. The aim is to facilitate the comprehension of the argument by signposting either the beginning or the end

of a logical step. Several devices can be distinguished: first there are brief injections such as “*io*” (37) or “right” (50) which not only affirm the truth of a past statement, but also allow for a brief pause to consider the impact of its message. Secondly, we find that questions, (whether true (48) or rhetorical (53)), serve to highlight the inevitability of a certain conclusion. And thirdly, there are meta-comments which either justify a subsequent utterance (“It is justified to say” (46)) or ‘name’ a preceding one so that an orientation is given for interpreting the respective text (72).<sup>6</sup>

The ‘avoidance of redundancy’ must also be mentioned as an effective means of suggesting cohesion and strengthening the argument: the discourse is devoid of any element which risks confusing the listener or distracting him from the main line of thought (digressions, repetitions etc.). Whenever he refers to an earlier point, it is not for the sake of reiteration, but to pick out a single aspect and develop it further. Given this ‘rhetorical discipline’, it may surprise – at least at first glance – that NT should close his speech with an almost verbatim repetition of the initial metaphor. Yet, on closer examination, we find that the meaning of the proverb differs from its initial sense in so far as it is now read in full knowledge of the context situation (disclosure of the identity of the ‘hunter’). It cannot therefore be regarded as an instance of redundancy (for a discussion of the significance of the back position of a metaphor see below).

#### 2.4.1.2. *kwankyamə*: explicative value and truth value

According to Berba oral literary criticism, a *kwankyamə* is defined in terms of its analogic character and its truth value, and esteemed for its ability to elucidate a given matter of fact or a certain view point (see chapter 5). It is these properties which render it particularly apt to serve as a rhetorical device in the process of persuasion. While its explicative function improves the comprehension of the reasoning, its truth value can be effectively exploited in

---

<sup>6</sup> Compare the notion of artful speech in the storytelling tradition, where it is greatly appreciated if the speaker provides a conclusion, which enables an insightful review of the entire story. The precondition is a coherent structure of the preceding text.

order to validate the premises of an argument and, in doing so, increase its persuasive force.

In recalling the surprising start of NT's speech, the notion of 'elucidation' does not seem justified. NT unexpectedly switches the code and introduces his discourse with poetic imagery, whose relation to the topic and context situation is by no means evident. However, alerted by the genre marker "the elders say..." the listener is prepared to watch out for further clues that contain the 'solution to the riddle' and await the revelation of the proverb's intended meaning. And indeed, once the metaphor has been delivered, a painstaking exegesis ensues in which the different layers of meaning are gradually disclosed and the individual terms of the metaphor interpreted in the light of the context situation. What is remarkable is the care with which NT explores each nuance (of meaning) in working his way up from the literal to the applied meaning. A review of the breakdown reveals the following pattern: imagery – exegesis of the imagery on a literal level – exegesis of the imagery on an applied level (focus on one term, the dogs) – examination of the proverb's abstract meaning against the ideal (incumbency model) – full revelation of the proverb's applied meaning by unveiling the hunter's identity (naming YS). Given this minuteness in approach and calling to mind the unusual length of the *kwankyamə*, it must be asked whether parts of the speech will not be dismissed as redundant or unnecessarily detailed?

AC: "Tawema, au cours de sa parole, fait souvent des références au proverbe qu'il a donné au début. Donc, son explication est très longue. Est-ce que c'est bien de parler pareillement?"

NK: "C'est parce qu'il cherche ce que les gens vont bien comprendre. C'est comme écrire. Si tu écris le nom de quelqu'un, même si c'est très long, si tu n'as pas fini tu ne peux pas t'arrêter au beau milieu! Tu dois finir le nom pour que les gens puissent dire: "Ah, c'est celui-là!" Parce que [...] quand il a donné le proverbe, il ne l'a pas tellement expliqué. Le proverbe était long. Maintenant il fallait bien l'expliquer pour que les gens puissent comprendre. S'il s'était arrêté là, les gens n'auraient pas compris par où il voulait passer."

Little needs to be added to this comprehensive statement. The scope of the exegesis is regarded as thoroughly appropriate, since it corresponds to the complexity of both the *kwankyamə* and its intended meaning (“Le proverbe était long. Maintenant il fallait bien l’expliquer pour que les gens puissent comprendre.”). In order to make the most of a proverb’s explicative value, the speaker must be careful in revealing the various layers of meaning. In view of the inherent ambiguity of a metaphor, it would be too great a risk to leave it to the addressee to extract the intended meaning by himself, the more so, if the intention is to launch a nuanced censure. At this point, it should be mentioned, however, that conspicuous detailedness may also have another implication. The decoding of a proverb preconditions a certain degree of intelligence. To come up with an elaborate exegesis may therefore also be taken as an insult, since the addressee is apparently considered incapable of conducting the analogic transfer by himself. Whether or not NT has actually intended to exploit this kind of implicature in order to mock his superior is debatable. In assessing the quality of the *kwankyamə* (which none of the critics had ever heard before), an elder notes:

YK: “Ce qu’il a dit c’est raisonnable, c’est un vrai proverbe. Ils ont même vu les chasseurs quand ils vont à la chasse. Au retour ils brûlent les intestins et les donnent à leurs chiens. En mangeant, ils prennent l’os et le jettent à leurs chiens. Après ça, ils cherchent la pâte et ils la leurs donnent. Le lendemain les chiens seront en joie quand ils retournent à la chasse et ils vont bien attraper.”

And a younger Berba adds (in explaining to me, the researcher):

DD: “Toi, par exemple, si tu convoques une réunion, nous venons mais après la réunion nous ne te demandons rien, parce que nous savons que tu remercieras les hommes. Nous sommes aussi encouragés par ce que tu fais. C’est pourquoi, si tu nous appelles à n’importe quelle heure, nous allons venir. Si tu nous invites et tu dis: “Donc, à demain!” nous allons nous retirer.”

In the indigenous view, the second principal asset of the proverb is its truth value. It is manifest in several ways: the proverb situation, to begin with,

corresponds to past experiences (“c’est *raisonnable*, c’est un *vrai* proverbe. *Ils ont même vu..*”). Secondly, the proverb is explicable on the literal level – a fact which is not only evidenced by the exegesis on the literal level, but is reiterated and affirmed in the critics’ own words (“au retour...attraper”). And thirdly, it is usefully applicable to a (fictive) context situation, as the last statement shows, where DN takes an example from the interview situation and interprets it in light of the advice offered by the metaphor (master encourages dogs by giving them innards, which in turn secures him their support :: researcher encourages interview partner by compensating them for their efforts after the interview). Having noted the importance of the validation of reasons or premises, we understand why a *kwankyamə* is highly appreciated as a rhetorical device in the process of persuasive argumentation. Due to its inherent complexity, it may not only carry an intended message on the applied level but also validate an argument due to its truth value on the literal level.

In backing up his argument, NT deploys one more technique which recalls Tswana oratory and their ‘incumbency model’ (Comaroff 1975: 155). Tswana make a clear distinction between office and office holder. The power of a chief stands or falls by the way in which he behaves as an incumbent and performs the duties attached to his office. If he fails to come up to the people’s expectations, they will deny him their support and he will forfeit respect and authority. This conception of leadership is reflected in Tswana political rhetoric, where commoners exploit two distinct codes, a ‘formal’ and an ‘evaluative’ one, as means of criticizing a superior. While the formal code, marking the beginning of each speech, highlights the incumbency as it should be, the evaluative code, following after, examines how far the office holder has come up to this ideal. It is by emphasizing either convergence or divergence between these different modes of expression, that a speaker may launch a nuanced censure of a superior. Although drawing on a different political tradition, the conception of leadership among the Berba is built on very similar grounds: individuals will be accorded power and authority as long as they fill their role and perform the duties expected of them (see chapter 2). This attitude becomes readily apparent in the following remark in which YK explains and justifies the villagers

contempt for the village head: "Si tu es un chef correct et tu fais bien ton travail, même si un jour tu as raté, les gens ne vont pas t'attaquer comme ça. Ils vont te pardonner. Mais celui-là, les gens voient que ça ne va pas!". Given this likeness in perception, it is not surprising that NT uses a strategy comparable to that of the Tswana in order to corroborate his argument. In his exegesis of the proverb's applied meaning, he briefly outlines the rights and duties of a village head (51) before pointing to the negative consequences (disrespect) that a poor performance would entail (63). This rhetorical form serves a twofold end: while the juxtaposition of different aspects (though not distinct codes) highlights the gravity of YS's failings and, by that, justifies the soundness of the censure, the reference to the incumbency model has a validating effect on reason II: no one, least of all YS, will question the basic principles of Berba politics. This, in turn, corroborates the main argument (call for change), since the premise on which it is built is commonly approved. Affirmatives such as *magere* ('true') or *tó* ('right') are important in this regard, since they suggest unanimity and unite the audience in their consent as to the basic principles of politics.<sup>7</sup>

Despite a somewhat surprising beginning, then, the speech can be described as lucid and carefully structured, with a gradual disclosure of the intended meaning of the metaphor and a persuasive reasoning built on valid arguments. Clarity in the text, however, does not necessarily mean clarity on the level of the speech event. And indeed, as a close examination reveals, there are two instances where the criterion of clarity is not fully adhered to: The first aspect concerns 'coherence on the level of the speech event' or 'relevance'. So far the disputants

---

<sup>7</sup> A striking parallel to NT's address regarding speech context, subject matter and rhetoric is the resignation speech by Sir Geoffrey Howe in the House of Commons on 13 November 1990, which eventually led to the downfall of Lady Margaret Thatcher a few days later. Furious and deceived, he accused the Prime Minister of frustrating her ministers' efforts by her autocratic style of leadership. His speech culminates in a metaphor with which he depicts her approach to government: "It is rather like sending your opening batsmen to the crease only for them to find, the moment the first balls are bowled, that their bats have been broken before the game by the team captain." (HC *Debs*, 13 November 1990, cols 464-65, cited in Jones 1995: 98). (I am grateful to Graham Furniss for having drawn my attention to this event; by its very similarity to the African case it challenges the boundaries between so-called 'oral' and 'written' cultures).



had been dealing with the problem of the pump's repair, when NT, in a surprising turn, switches both code (proverb) and subject matter (censure of the village head). Although this deviation from the main strand of debate seems to violate the maxim of relevance, critics do not consider it as entirely aberrant, since it is YS's inefficiency and lack of commitment which is ultimately responsible for the group's poor performance including their failure to collect the subscription for the pump's repair. A sound censure of the village head is therefore overdue and acceptable whenever it occurs in the ongoing debate:

AC: "NT, en prenant la parole, a introduit un nouveau point...Est-ce que c'est bon d'introduire quelque chose qui est entièrement différent?"

NK: "Il voulait lui en parler depuis longtemps. C'est pourquoi il n'a pas suivi le fil de la discussion avant que les gens ne continuent la réunion [...] Quand NT l'a attaqué, ce n'était pas tellement grave. Ce n'était pas hors sujet, mais c'est en voyant son travail, son comportement qu'il lui a parlé comme ça."

Secondly, NT, although extremely nuanced otherwise, fails to provide one essential piece of information, namely a hint at the incident which actually triggered his anger. As the ensuing debate suggests, however, this omission is less incidental than deliberate, and used as a device of indirectness. NT counts on the intelligence of YS to recognize what exactly is being referred to and spare him the revelation of embarrassing details.

#### 2.4.2. Conflict management and devices of indirectness

Clear diction has proved indispensable for the delivery of a constructive, i.e. nuanced and well-founded, criticism. Yet, at the same time, it may also be seriously damaging and counterproductive by provoking instead of resolving conflicts and destroying the basis for any further discussion. It is therefore vital, and a sign of verbal skill, to deploy devices which help to tone down censure without, however, impairing its comprehensibility or persuasive force.

#### 2.4.2.1. *kwankyamə*

Again, it is the proverb which plays a crucial role in this regard. In commenting on NT's speech, one critic notes:

NK: "Si tu veux injurier quelqu'un, même un chef, il faut chanter en l'injuriant. Comme ça il sera en joie. Mais si tu lui dis quelque chose directement, 'terre-à-terre', il va se fâcher vite. Le proverbe aide à la diluer; il va le découvrir, même si c'est un peu tard. Après il comprendra ce que l'autre veut lui dire."

To NT, then, a proverb represents an important means of indirectness and conflict prevention ("chanter").<sup>8</sup> It makes it possible to tone down censure ("diluer") while elucidating it at the same time ("il va le découvrir, même si c'est un peu tard"). This is beautifully illustrated in our example, where richly textured imagery helps to cushion the attack and render the criticism more easily acceptable. Two different functions can be noted, depending on the proverb's position in the text: there is, firstly, the 'dissective' effect of a preceding *kwankyamə*: placed at the beginning of a speech, the listener has no information as to the referential background (provided that it does not refer to a precedent part). He is thus obliged to contemplate the proverb's meaning on the literal and abstract level unless the context and intended meaning are disclosed. If the message contains a censure, this technique is of great importance, for it means that the listener is accorded some time to become acquainted with the main points of censure and contemplate the main argument 'in the abstract' before the metaphor is decoded and he is eventually carried away by his anger over personal offence.<sup>9</sup> Delaying the full disclosure of a metaphor enhances the constructive value of censure, since the listener tries to comprehend the

---

<sup>8</sup> *yuensi*, to sing, is a term of great semantic complexity: apart from its literal meaning, it also denotes any speech act which is driven by the intention to avoid conflict and instead see to a friendly and joyful atmosphere. Most important in this regard is the women's song tradition, whose function is not only to entertain a public, but, much more essentially to provide a means by which serious criticism is issued in an indirect, joyful way, making it easier for the addressee to accept public rebuke and ridicule (proverbs and praise-names as pacifying elements).

<sup>9</sup> The example illustrates, what IT has described as strategy of surprise attack, using the metaphor of catching a hen with a bait (see chapter 5).

reasoning at least once, on the abstract level. Even if he does not agree with it, it is conducive to a fruitful debate, where problems are resolved through the exchange of ideas. In a similar vein, it increases the persuasive force of a speech, for the listener may well approve of the truth value of the proverb on the literal level, which in turn may render him more susceptible to the truth of the applied meaning and the justification of the censure as well.

While the function of a preceding proverb can be described as dissective, i.e. orientating the listener towards one singular facet of argumentation (its depersonalized impact), a closing proverb has a truly 'diluting' effect. The reversion to the initial imagery in (60) occurs right after the climax of the criticism with the first and only direct attack on YS (59). This moment of highest tension is immediately defused by dissolving the personal 'you' of the censure into the generalized 'you' in the metaphor.<sup>10</sup> To close a speech with a proverb serves yet another purpose. It is commonplace that what is mentioned last, will best be remembered. In ending the discourse with a summarizing "this is the end of the story of the dogs" the speaker draws attention to the metaphor, in which the nature of the problem and not the identity of the agents is to the fore. Hence, people are not only given a mnemonic device to recall the speech, but will also remember the main argument (i.e. a superior should care for his subjects) rather than the personal attack.

#### 2.4.2.2. Use of pronouns

Although operating in a more subtle way, pronouns also represent an effective means of indirectness. As a close examination of the text reveals, first and third pronouns abound, while the second person pronoun (with a direct address) is deployed only once, namely when the speech reaches its climax in (59). Since YS, the target of censure, is sitting next to the speaker, the delay of a direct address can reasonably be interpreted as an attempt to meet the criterion of 'constructiveness' by keeping the speech free from personal resentment and

<sup>10</sup> This technique builds on the linguistic properties of *kwankyamə*, which most often features the second or third person pronoun in order to suggest truth and general applicability.

avoiding a direct attack at least as long as the main arguments have not yet been revealed. In this context, it is worth mentioning the rhetorical function of the first person pronoun, which serves the same goal, though in a different manner: as can be noted in the text, first person pronouns tend to be deployed at strategically significant points before a weighty argument, for example, or a personal attack. They often occur in combination with a meta-statement denoting the speaker's attitude towards the addressee ("I disregard him"). In such a way, the speaker confirms his intention to take full responsibility for the utterance and stand by his view. In calling to mind the nature of the speech event, the significance of this measure becomes evident: unlike the other participants in the debate, NT takes a double role as member of the group and the village head's first advisor. In his discourse he plays on both of these functions in order to make a constructive contribution: by personalizing the criticism, he brings up a communal conflict, yet renders it a personal matter between him and the village head. This shift has a twofold effect: first of all, it discharges the rest of the group from the responsibility for the criticism, which, in turn, considerably lowers the potential for conflict. Secondly, it is no longer an affair between the group and their representative, but between the village head and his first councillor. In this constellation, the conditions for a constructive dispute are greatly improved, since YS will (hopefully) feel less offended by the attack of someone who is loyal, enjoys a high prestige and whose advice and opinion matter to him.

In concluding, NT's speech can be regarded as the ready example of a successful speech: the speaker is appreciated for both his linguistic and moral or social competence. Thanks to the skilful use of devices of clarity and indirectness, he is able to not only deliver a nuanced censure, but also make plain that it is neither arbitrary nor personal, but, to the contrary, well-founded and motivated by a genuine fear for the well-being of the community. Both message and intent are thus most appropriate and explain the positive evaluation of the speech.

## 2.5. Sequence 5 (69-73)

YS:

69 "I don't understand what he is talking about."

ND:

70 "No, no, it is not your turn!

71 [To NT] Have you finished?"

NT:

72 "Yes, I will stop here."

ND:

73 "Who wants to say something?"

YS comes in and declares that he had no grasp of what NT was referring to (69). Whether or not this is true remains an open question. ND rebukes YS for taking the floor without having been entitled to, before turning to NT and asking him to confirm the closure of his speech (71). NT complies with the request (72) whereupon ND opens the floor again by asking for further contributions (73).

### Discussion:

The sequence readily illustrates what has been noted earlier on speech behaviour in a group. One of the most remarkable features is the discipline with which many debates take place. This is mainly due to a set of speech conventions which revolve around the turn-taking mechanism and grant speaker certain rights, but also require some duties from him. While he is entitled to an undisturbed delivery of his discourse, he must not abuse this right, e.g. by endless talk, but keep to a certain time limit and permit others the floor as well. To this end, he is expected to indicate the closure of his contribution in one way or another and authorize another participant to take the floor (see chapter 2). Line (71-73) exemplifies both these rights and duties: YS is rebuked for having interrupted NT, whereupon NT restores the order by formally closing his speech with a meta-statement.

The brief exchange also shows something else, namely the way in which speech behaviour mirrors and feeds back to the notion of authority and social standing: in the indigenous view, the speech situation in a political debate is marked by equality and speech conventions are binding to every one of the participants. The rebuke of YS by another speaker is therefore perfectly justified:

AC: "Est-ce que c'était correct de l'interrompre ou pas?"

ND: "C'est une règle. Parce que celui qui avait parlé n'avait pas encore fini, et un autre voulait prendre la parole. C'est pourquoi je lui ai dit qu'il n'a pas la parole maintenant."

Yet, even though there can be no objection against the corrective measure *per se*, there are nonetheless other conventions which concern the tone and the way of speaking in relation to the social standing of the speech partners, which are clearly violated here. Although ND enjoys a high reputation in the village, he is nonetheless inferior to YS in terms of rank and age. To reprimand YS in such a brusque manner is incompatible with the requirement of respectful address towards higher ranking people; the deliberate flouting of rules must hence be interpreted as an expression of his disregard for the village head, who is denied the most basic rights. Despite its brevity, the spoken exchange helps to further damage the already low reputation and weak authority of the village head: He violates the rules himself by interrupting a speaker, and hence behaves in a manner unworthy of an elder. He then makes a rather helpless attempt to refute NT's attack with the remark that he did not know what NT was talking about (although, as we will see, he is quite aware of the conflict between himself and the other members of the group) and, finally, he tolerates a tone which, in fact, is inappropriate.

## 2.6. Sequence 6 (74 -84)

MB:

74 "We are talking about the problem of the pump, we are all giving our points of view, (but) we all should (just) talk about the water problem and clarify our ideas about how we want to resolve it.

- 75 Now that I am speaking I would like to come back to what we concluded then (i.e. at the meeting in September).
- 76 We had noticed that there was all kinds of work, (and) we didn't know how to handle it (the problem).
- 77 We sat there and wanted to convene a general assembly and see how to proceed (do).
- 78 The other day, I heard the *délegué* beating the drum, announcing (an assembly about) the wells, although we had finished with the wells a long time ago.
- 79 They had asked to send the papers (i.e. applications).
- 80 I do not know whether he has sent them away.
- 81 To do it he would not have to ask the (village) population.
- 82 As far as I'm concerned, I want to see whether we could convene a general assembly.
- 83 All the villagers would have to come, and we would tell them how we plan to collect the money for the well.
- 84 This is my point of view."

It is now MB who takes the floor. He begins his speech with a reminder of the initial problem and a call for a fact-oriented debate (74-77). Having resumed the main thread of debate, he seeks to obtain clarity as regards the subject matter. As he had heard, they (i.e. the ministry of water management) had apparently offered to construct wells and pumps in the Atakora region, and set a deadline for applications from those villages interested (79).<sup>11</sup> If that was true, he would like to know whether the central issue of the present meeting concerned the application for a new pump or the repair of the old pump. While in the first case, it would be up to the *délegué* to send away the applications (though he, MB, was not sure whether YS had already done it), in the latter case, he would suggest a general assembly in order to discuss the financial contribution (80-84).

#### Discussion:

What interests us here, is the speaker's declared aim to restore order and re-create the conditions for a fruitful discussion: In his introduction, MB re-frames the event by abandoning the sensitive issue of the village head's poor performance and re-directing the focus towards the initial problem of water

---

<sup>11</sup> At the time of the assembly the deadline had already passed.

management in Kotari. He then makes an attempt to define the matter under discussion, whereby he draws on new (though unconfirmed) information, and suggests possible answers. Both moves are beneficial to the actual speech situation: not only is some of the tension which has been generated by NT's heavy attack eased but also a clear orientation is also given as to the course of the debate.

Although the speech seems to perfectly match the proclaimed goal of leaving behind all resentments, a close inspection reveals that MB is in fact fairly close to NT's reproach, much closer than he pretends to be: in underscoring that his knowledge was based on rumours, he implicitly accuses YS of having withheld important pieces of information from the *groupement*, i.e. the institution most directly concerned, while generously spreading the news elsewhere. By that he illustrates and substantiates in a subtle way what NT has criticized in outspoken terms: that YS was neglecting his duties and did not take the rest of the group seriously.

## 2.7. Sequence 7 (85-103)

NS:

- 85 "If all the people in charge of the *groupement* were here, we could settle (the issue) straight away.
- 86 Who would go home and not inform his family member (of our decision)?
- 87 *Tó!*
- 88 Here are four people (i.e. members of the committee) absent.
- 89 We will settle the issue nonetheless.
- 90 Mberma will inform the members of his house, Nikola will go and inform those of his house, Kyeu will inform those of his house and Kuri Kyundu those of his house.
- 91 Look around you and make some efforts!
- 92 It isn't difficult to collect (the money)."

MB:

- 93 "Before the others speak, I will intervene.
- 94 There isn't any problem.
- 95 Why do I say that?



- 96 Everyone has agreed that the tam-tam should be beaten to call everyone, women, men and children to leave their homes and to come together in order to hear about the problem that we have.
- 97 Even if only a few people come, we can nonetheless achieve something."

NN:

- 98 "For those who refuse: we will all hear with our own ears what will be suggested as a financial contribution.
- 99 If it is just, and if we have consented to it, one day someone might come and say:
- 100 "As far as I'm concerned, I am neither willing nor able (to make my contribution) (lit: I am not in favour of it)!"
- 101 The water is for everyone.
- 102 (Yet) we have to accept that (even) if this person does not make his contribution, we (i.e. the others) will have to deposit something.
- 103 If we have to deposit some money, we will know it and tell our mothers at home that (it is) to secure the water supply in the village."

In the following part NS, MB and NN discuss the need for and procedural aspects of a general assembly. The question is raised as to the measures that should be taken if villagers neither participate in the assembly nor subscribe to the project. NN takes an optimistic view, by arguing that even if some villagers refuse, the association could count on the support of everyone else, since an improved water supply would benefit the entire village.

#### Discussion:

In commenting on the sequence, one critic remarks:

NK: "Mberma a dit que certains représentants des clans n'étaient pas là et qu'on ne pouvait pas tenir la réunion. Mais le secrétaire a dit: "Non, ce n'est pas grave. On va essayer d'informer les gens jusqu'à l'assemblée générale." C'est bien. Le proverbe que Tawema a donné revient là, c'est à dire le *délégué* est en train de fuir sa responsabilité! Normalement il pouvait just dire ça. Mais il ne fait rien et ce sont les autres qui l'annonceront."

What is interesting, is the fact that the critic instantly relates the content of the debate to the *kwankyamə* used by NT, although this has not been explicitly mentioned in the text. This kind of cross-reference illustrates, firstly, the explicative value and naming quality of a *kwankyamə*, which is instantly associated with a certain argument, and, secondly, the way in which an audience perceives a debate not as a chain of disconnected utterances, but as a coherent entity where links can be established between the individual contributions.

## 2.8. Sequence 8 (104-31)

ND:

- 104 "What I wanted to say...I haven't yet finished (with it).
- 105 What I want to say is that you know that [2] *the holes without ground are greedy*.
- 106 It isn't that we have not or have not been able to fix the price.
- 107 We already said: "Whether woman or man, each one has to collect 250 CFA and revive our well."
- 108 [3] *If you have a wife and you don't dress her (properly), you will end up not approaching her*.
- 109 We came together and achieved something (on that occasion).
- 110 Now, we can see (how it really is).
- 111 *Tó!*
- 112 I don't know.
- 113 We know that things can happen to people.
- 114 As far as I'm concerned, I don't want to criticize anyone, but I would very much like to talk about all the problems!
- 115 We have said: "The people in charge of the pump must go to (each) compound and ask (its residents for the money)."
- 116 You say there is (a lot of) work.
- 117 You go to someone (but) he has just begun to work in the fields again, like now.
- 118 If you ask him for some money, and he says that he hasn't got anything, it is understandable.
- 119 At that moment (i.e. at the assembly), everyone was there.
- 120 There will be some, who, if you ask, will refuse categorically to give their money either to you or to anyone else.
- 121 If you have worked (i.e. tried to get the money), (but) it hasn't turned out well, we will know (it).
- 122 We will close the well for anyone, who says that he won't pay.

- 123 We know that [4] *if you keep a woman at home who is ill, (and) you don't care for her, but, on the contrary, oblige her to do all the cooking, everyone will know that you want to kill her.*
- 124 *And her parents will seek to take her back.*
- 125 *(It is then) that you will take her to the hospital as soon as possible.*
- 126 *When she is healed, she will prepare the porridge (i.e. cook for you) again.*
- 127 This is what I wanted to say.”

MB:

- 128 “I haven’t said so because I had (too much) work.
- 129 (No, it was because) the tam-tam had not yet been beaten, and a man cannot go and tour around in the village just like that!
- 130 *Tó!*
- 131 We would have had to organize a little meeting.”

ND takes the floor and produces a lengthy statement. After a justificatory meta-comment (104) he touches on two questions raised by preceding speakers. The first point is introduced by a *kwankyamə* (105) followed by an exegesis of three sentences (106-08). Applied to the context situation, the image of ‘endless consumption’ can be read in two ways: it either means that people should not fear an excessive contribution (fear of expenses :: endless worry) or that there was little need to worry about endless debates in the future regarding the amount of money, since it had been fixed long ago. A second proverb follows (108) which emphasizes the need to reach a good decision (“dress her properly”) and justifies both the collection and the amount of money (“otherwise the woman will not be approached”). This leads to a brief reminder that the collection of money had already been agreed upon at an earlier stage. Yet, nothing had been effected so far, since the collectors were doubtful about the villagers’ willingness to pay their share (109+115-18). In view of the common consent to the contribution, ND argues, any refusal constituted a divisive act, which ought to be sanctioned by denying access to the pump. The speech is rounded off by a third *kwankyamə*, which is warning and assurance at the same time. In the long run, ND prophesies, anyone who had refused to pay would acknowledge his error (“you will bring her to hospital”) and recognize

the value of a secure water supply. MB, speaking next, refutes the reproach of a lack of initiative and points to formal irregularities which would have prevented the members of the group from carrying out the collection of the money (128-31).

#### Discussion:

In the text many elements recur which have already figured in other speeches: the deployment of an introductory proverb as an attention catching device, the careful structuring of a text or the direction of an interpretation by a subsequent exegesis. Here, I will concentrate on role and significance of the two final *kwankyamə*.<sup>12</sup>

When describing the role of proverbs in the context of persuasive argumentation, it is most often the supportive function which is emphasized: by ‘naming’ or ‘summarizing’ a point or an argument, they help to explicate and render more palpable an idea, which has been or will be expounded in prose in the text. Yet as the two final *kwankyamə* show, proverbs not only substantiate or corroborate an argument, but can serve as powerful arguments in their own right, flowing as conclusions from a prose text and conveying insight and advice to the listener. This becomes readily clear from the following statements in which Berba critics explain their positive judgement of the proverbs:

YK: “Quand Dari a parlé, il a donné des tels éclaircissements que Mberma a ajouté quelque chose de son part et c’est devenu important.”

AC: “Quels éclaircissements?”

NK: “Dari a donné un proverbe en disant que s’il y a une malade et que tu ne t’occupes pas d’elle mais que tu l’obliges à te préparer (le repas) – lorsque ses parents vont la retirer, tu souffriras pendant trois jours et tu seras obligé d’aller chez ses parents leur demander pardon et l’amener au centre de santé. Cela veut dire, si nous ne voulons pas nous occuper d’elle, si les

---

<sup>12</sup> Limited space does not allow for an investigation into another aspect, namely the apologetic meta-commentary in (116) in which ND attempts to lift the following critique to an objective level and thus to avert future conflict.

gens ferment la pompe, tout le monde saura ce que la pompe nous fait [...] Il a aussi parlé d'une femme. Si tu ne l'habilles pas, tu finiras par ne plus l'approcher. Cela veut dire: La pompe, c'est une femme. Si tu ne l'habilles pas et elle se gâte, comment va-t-on l'approcher?"

The comprehensive judgement is revealing in several respects: first, nowhere in the text has the advice been mentioned which NK infers from the imagery. This substantiates the idea that proverbs are indeed perceived and operate as arguments in their own right (remember the dictum 'un proverb, c'est une parole' in chapter 5). Secondly, it illustrates what has been said about the quality and rhetorical function of a *kwankyamə*. As we have learned in the chapter on proverb theory, two of the main evaluative criteria are a *kwankyamə*'s explicative and advisory value. According to the indigenous statements, it is precisely these two criteria which characterize the proverbs and account for the positive judgement of the speech. In answering a question as to the insights provided by ND, NK comes forth with an almost verbatim repetition of the proverbs before expounding their applied meaning to the researcher. This shows, that a) the speaker has been successful in drawing on the explicative and advisory potential of the *kwankyamə*, for it is they which are considered to be the most insightful passages of the text and b) that one of the strengths of this genre is indeed its analogic character, which allows the speaker to play with several levels of meaning at a time and make a powerful statement, which is explicative (imagery) and insightful (intended message). To NK, it is sufficient to reiterate the metaphors, since to him they represent the essence of ND's speech, put in a most palpable and comprehensive form. Nonetheless, to prove his thorough comprehension of the proverb, and, most importantly, explicate its advisory value to the researcher (who he is not sure has grasped its full impact), NK follows up each metaphor with a prose version of its intended meaning. The last proverb, for example, is translated with "the value of a pump will at least be noticed after it has been closed", which, in turn, holds the conclusion "we have to see to its repair". The ease with which the message is decoded leads us to the third point, which concerns the

preconditions for an effective use of this technique (i.e. the application of proverbs as arguments in their own right). Once more, the clue to success is the careful composition of the preceding text. Without it, the listener will miss the main thread of argument and hence be unable to comprehend possible conclusions, all the more so if it occurs in a disguised form. In summary, as clearly emerges from the discussion, the quality of the speech is inextricably linked to the quality of the proverb use. By skilfully exploiting the explicative and advisory potential of a *kwankyamə*, the speaker lends to his contribution 'constructive value', the quality so highly appreciated among Berba.

In talking about constructiveness, we have to mention another element, which is suggested by YK in his comment "c'est pourquoi Mberma a ajouté pour lui-même, et ça devient important." We remember: in responding to ND's speech, MB rejects the reproach of a missing initiative. In the eyes of the critic, then, it is already the fact that ND has triggered a reaction and induced an exchange of ideas which renders his contribution important. Also, by declaring his position, he has given MB the opportunity to correct and clarify a certain matter of fact (catalyst function). Both aspects are vital to a debate whose aim is to settle an issue or make a communal decision.

Before turning to the next sequence, one last word concerning the first *kwankyamə*. Unlike the two final proverbs, it is not mentioned once by any of the critics in discussion. This omission can be interpreted as a negative response to an instance of rhetorical failure. As a review of the introduction shows, the proverb's relation to the context situation is by no means evident. This obscurity can be attributed to the proverb's exposed position, an insufficient exegesis (one phrase) or the imagery, which is not only questionable in terms of intelligibility or truth value on the literal level, but also lacks a fitting analogy in the context situation.

## 2.9. Sequence 9 (132-57)

ND:

132 Once more, I will talk about what Tawema has said.

133 I will contribute to it.

- 134 I will neither criticize the *bega*, nor will I leave him or anyone else out.
- 135 You, the members (of the ADV), and the *bega*, you are the same.
- 136 What is the problem?
- 137 He has nothing to do other than to sit down and devise a schedule for the work and set it out (to you).
- 138 If you have a close look around, you will see that all the villages (constitute) a community, (but) there is also someone in charge, who cares for them.
- 139 We all must unite.
- 140 He has seen that you know how to run.
- 141 [5] *If you have dogs which run and leave you alone, you will chase and try to kill them.*
- 142 *They will run, run (for a long time), but they will return home.*
- 143 If you know what you want, and what he has (the power and duty) to do, but he does not act accordingly, you must remind him and you will get along well with each other.
- 144 And you have to tell him: "We want you to help us.
- 145 If you help us, we will understand what it is all about.
- 146 We work with our might, but we are not the head of the village.
- 147 It is the village head who must intervene due to his position.
- 148 We can't do anything about it.
- 149 We can't go to court and say that he has refused to work.
- 150 First we have to call upon the chief and understand what it is all about."
- 151 If he goes and says that he doesn't understand you, they (i.e. the village population) will call you to account and treat you like traitors to the village.
- 152 You won't have an official paper which certifies the existence of our work group.
- 153 You should have proposed the rules (of the work group) and published them amongst yourselves.
- 154 If it doesn't work out, you could say:
- 155 "We don't want to stay (work) with this man any longer."
- 156 You could call together a general assembly and say: "We cannot work together with this man any more.
- 157 The village shall hear of this man who does not want to support us."

After MB's short interjection, it is ND who takes the floor again. He gives the debate a somewhat unexpected turn by picking up the initial conflict between NT and YS instead of pursuing further the issue of the pump. In his introduction, he underscores his determination to take a neutral stance towards the quarrelling parties (132-34). He begins with a reminder of the basic precepts of their association (135-39). Despite a positional hierarchy, the guiding principle would be that of 'co-operation': each member would be of equal importance in terms of his individual function within the entire project. Whereas the primary duty of the leader consisted in planning and conceiving a project, it was up to the other members of the group to see to its successful realisation. What appeared as a lack of engagement on the part of the village head could hence also be viewed in very different terms, namely as an expression of his trust in the members' maturity and sense of responsibility (140). In taking up the metaphor of the hunter and his dogs, ND examines the implications of dogs (= members) distancing themselves too far (= working too independently) from their master (= boss). He first takes YS's perspective and concludes that there was no need to worry, since, even if the dogs attempted to break out, the deep bond between them and their master would persist, so that sooner or later they would return home (141-42). Attention is then drawn to the dogs and possible reasons for their disobedient behaviour. If the main cause was the poor performance of their master, it would seem appropriate to resolve the differences in a constructive debate. In the following part, ND imagines a hypothetical situation, in which the members would take the *délégué* to task (143-51), and contemplates suitable measures if – still fictive – the village head repudiated the censure or pretended not to understand (152-59).

#### Discussion:

The speaker's intention is obvious: he takes the role of a self-declared arbitrator, who attempts to reconcile the quarrelling parties (YS vs. the rest of the group/ MS). The aspect of 'conflict management' is emphasized. In the following part, we shall examine the rhetorical strategies by which ND tries to accomplish his goal. The comprehensive statement by a Berba critic gives valuable hints:



AC: "Dari a commencé sa parole en disant: "Je ne veux ni critiquer quelqu'un ni le laisser de côté. Est-ce que c'est bien de réconcilier des gens par des mots pareils ou est-ce que c'est un peu vague?"

NK: "C'est ce qu'on doit faire. S'il y a deux personnes opposées, pour les séparer il ne faut pas dire premièrement: "Tel a raison, tel n'a pas raison!" On dit d'abord: "Moi, je ne critique personne." Quand tu introduis ton discours, les gens connaîtront celui qui n'a pas raison. C'est clair. Maintenant, tu les as séparés en même temps."

According to NK, ND's speech is in perfect line with the basic principles of arbitration ("c'est comment on doit faire"). Two aspects exemplify these skills. There is, first, the use of intention markers. ND begins his discourse with a programmatic (meta)-statement, affirming his determination to take an impartial view and examine the case fairly ("I will neither criticize nor leave anyone out"). The rhetorical effect is twofold: by commenting on the nature of the subsequent speech, he defines the framework for assessing the content of the speech and exonerates himself from moral failure: whatever is going to follow, it must not be mistaken as a personal attack, but regarded as a necessary though unpleasant step in the quest for justice and peace. The objective is to reconcile and not to judge the quarrelling parties.<sup>13</sup>

Having prepared the ground for a critical inquiry, the speaker can now effectively exploit the situation by stage managing the 'forceless force of emerging truth', the second crucial technique in the process of arbitration.<sup>14</sup> The idea is that 'truth' will emerge by itself once the problem has been looked at from different perspectives ("quand tu introduis ton discours maintenant les gens connaîtront celui qui n'a pas raison"). The advantage in the context of conflict management is obvious: given that the issue concerns the misconduct of an individual, it becomes no longer necessary to explicitly name the culprit. That

<sup>13</sup> YK recognizes ND's (self-declared) role as an arbitrator: "Dari a agi ainsi pour les séparer. S'il n'avait pas parlé pareillement, les gens n'auraient pas fait cette bêtise. Dari les avait conseillé pour qu'ils prennent leurs responsabilités et s'occupent du village."

<sup>14</sup> The expression is inspired by Habermas' notion of the "zwangloser Zwang des besseren Argumentes (the forceless force of the better argument) (1970: 121).

not only allows him to save face in public, but it also makes it easier for him to accept the criticism, provided he comprehends and acknowledges the implicature. Skilfully applied, this method may even induce the peaceful settlement of the conflict (“tu les as séparés en même temps”).<sup>15</sup> Once again, the success of this device depends on the careful structure of the preceding text, from which the ‘truth’ consistently flows. In scrutinizing ND’s speech, we can note a clear effort to keep to the agenda and produce a balanced discussion. Having considered the position of the village head, he changes his focus and contemplates the issue from the perspective of the members of the group. Particularly interesting in this regard is the technique used to smooth over the (risky) juncture between two opposing views using a proverb. There is no clear-cut conclusion in the form of a verdict or a final conclusion. (Despite ND’s declared commitment to impartiality, however, there is a clear bias, evident in the strategic positioning of the members’ point of view at the end of the speech).

The third observation concerns the notion of ‘fiction as a device of indirectness’. I am referring to (143-50) where ND manages to deliver a direct criticism without a direct address. His technique is simple, but effective. By shifting from reality to fiction (shifter ‘if’) he de-contextualizes the speech and redefines its interpretative frame. Whatever is going to follow, it can only be judged in terms of a hypothetical situation. The shift also re-defines the main actors in the verbal exchange. We are dealing now with a dialogue between the speaker (ND) and the members of the association (‘you’). The exclusion of YS from this situation is manifest in the use of the third person pronoun (‘he’). The introductory passage is the delivery of a fictive discourse (145-51) in which ND gives an example of how to address a ‘master’ who lacks encouragement and support. Since there is no direct addressee, there is no one who could be angered by such talk. In such a way the actual target (here YS) is deprived of any legitimate ground on which to become annoyed and strike back. ND

---

<sup>15</sup> For all that, we must not forget that we are dealing here with the cultural *model* of mediation, predicated upon the assumption of an ideal arbitrator, who is committed to truth and determined to settle the matter in a just and peaceful way. In reality, however, this technique may equally be exploited to promote a favoured party and advocate their case under the guise of apparent objectivity.

exploits the hypothetical situation further by following his criticism with a similarly direct-indirect warning against likely consequences that would arise from such irresponsible behaviour (151-57): a leader who does not change his conduct will have to reckon with serious sanctions by the community.

#### 2.10. Sequence 10 (158-95)

MS:

158 I don't agree at all with what you say.

159 I've had my problems, but I've never left out the *délégué*."

ND:

160 "I am not suggesting that you have left out the *délégué*!

161 When have you sat down together?

162 You have appealed to him about five times, but he has never, even once, responded.

163 Have you been able to call together your collaborators?

164 You and his advisors should say: "This man, he is a person in charge."

165 As far as I'm concerned, I'm also a person in charge.

166 I've told him about these problems, but he has not done anything about them."

167 What do you say?

168 It is as if you were working in vain."

NT:

169 "At that time they released the news about new drillings.

170 They had recommended: "Do not hand in the application any later than January."

171 As far as I can remember, I had taken the application form with me last Thursday and given it to Sambieni (YS).

172 He in turn had to hand it back on (the following) Monday.

173 But today, January has passed.

174 The well is not sufficient, since we haven't done anything to repair it.

175 We should have worked and sent the application form to the sub-prefect if we wanted to have several water supplies.

176 It hasn't been done.

177 The other villages have already finished with theirs, and we, we haven't done anything (here at Kotari).

178 They've said that the last to apply wouldn't get a pump.

- 179 Others will say that the people haven't applied for the pump.  
180 We haven't done it and we will be criticized.  
181 You know that we didn't work.  
182 That shouldn't have been (the case) at that time.  
183 The application for the pump hasn't yet been handed in.  
184 We are condemning each other.  
185 We are sitting here, and there are some (people) amongst us,  
who know the (person in charge of the project).  
186 If he arrives, he might ask, but he won't find anything, (because)  
we, we won't know anything at this time.  
[...]  
187 That is why I am sad.  
188 The people have asked when it will be finished (the wells).  
189 The wells won't suffice.  
190 What are we going to do about it then?  
191 Don't you know that this is a big problem?  
192 I have finished.

The ensuing discussion between three members of the group can be summarized in a few words: MS dismisses ND's reproach that the 'dogs had run away', i.e. that the members had ignored YS, whereupon ND states more precisely that what he was rebuking was not a lack of loyalty, but a lack of courage to debate existing differences. NT, in turn, takes up the initial subject, and reports what has been done so far to secure the water supply of Kotari. More than any direct accusation, it is this detailed account which makes plain who is actually to blame for the poor performance of the group. YS had failed to send away the applications in time, so it was now up to the members to go into action. Otherwise they would incur the villagers' fury and lose face before the other villages.

#### 2.11. Sequence 11 (193 - 216)

- YS: [addressing NT]  
193 I think (as far as I can remember), you were there when the  
problem of the well (was discussed).  
194 When you returned after having participated (in the assembly)  
what did you do?  
195 You, *eh, eh*, you are collaborating with me!

196 Did you come one night, *eh*, in order to talk about this problem  
with me and ask me what to do?  
197 How can you criticize me even though we are collaborating?  
198 At that moment, you ought to have come to see me.  
199 How do we work?  
200 If we notice a problem and we return (home), we should sit  
down together and think about how to tackle it.  
201 You, *eh*, you are here, but you haven't come (to see me).  
202 I've beaten the drum, but I haven't seen anybody.  
203 They have proposed: "Let us meet in the evening."  
204 It was you yourself who had proposed to come together in the  
evening.  
205 I was going to (the market of) Magou, to drink some beer..."

ND:

206 "Just tell us your weaknesses...!"

YS:

207 "I will tell them.  
208 You criticize me, you criticize me.  
209 What have I been unable to work out?  
210 Where haven't I done anything?  
211 Just say 'this' or 'that'!  
212 "You haven't done this, you haven't done that."  
213 Concerning the first well, we've made some effort and done it!  
214 Concerning this well, I say: "The people accuse the *délegué* of  
being a thief."  
215 They say that I steal and 'eat' (i.e. spent it for myself).  
216 What have I 'eaten' in it?"

NT:

217 "If you (want to) stop, just say so."

YS:

218 "I say that you speak and you criticize me.  
219 I say: "Don't criticize me!"

Without any formal introduction YS heads straight off and accuses NT of lacking initiative (194), co-operativeness (195-96) and solidarity (197). He refers to an assembly where the plans of the ministry of water management had been presented for the first time. NT, who had been present as well, had not felt

the need to discuss the next steps with him afterwards, although it would have been his duty as the chief councillor of the *délégué* (194+199-201). YS then abruptly changes the topic, and complains that no villager turned up when he recently convened a general assembly (202) despite the fact – and here he contradicts himself – that it had been they themselves, i.e. NT and the rest of the group, who had suggested it. Another mental leap, and he begins to ponder what he himself did that particular day (205). ND cuts him short and invites him to ‘confess his weaknesses’ (206). YS agrees, yet starts with a bitter complaint that any criticism was entirely unfounded (211-12). He then names a concrete allegation – the theft of money – which he wishes to see dismissed (215-16). Once more he is interrupted, this time by a request to come to a close (217). He responds with an ‘order’ not to criticize him (218-19).

#### Discussion:

In applying the canon of evaluative criteria for political language, the poor quality of YS’ speech is readily evident: Compared to preceding utterances, YS’s speech (in particular the first part) appears extremely explicit and outspoken. Not only does he personally address NT in (196-201) and (204-07), but he also questions him three times in a very straightforward manner (197, 199, 200). The forum of debate is thus transformed into a fighting ground between two individuals. This, along with the urging tone and impulsive note of his speech (mainly justificatory attempts), disqualifies the speaker in several ways: firstly, he proves himself to be governed by emotions – the opposite of how a good speaker should be, namely *yamfumə*, wise, even-tempered. Secondly, he flouts the most basic rules of social interaction, by attacking NT in a way which is thoroughly inappropriate and goes far beyond an argumentative defence: he disregards the fact that NT, as his first councillor, is entitled to criticize him, and that he defends a common cause. And he ignores the fact that NT is older than him, and, moreover, enjoys a high reputation as a *hirəkyau*. Thus, even if YS chose to rebuke his councillor, he should still be obliged to take into account his status and address him with respect. Yet he does not, and,

in such a way, gives ready evidence of his poor social competence, which will further damage his already weak position.<sup>16</sup>

Another observation concerns linguistic deficiencies in the style and structure of the text. A certain incoherence in the speech suggests that the speaker is not in full control of his words. Inter alia, we can note a remarkable lack of framing devices. YS starts off in a very brusque, abrupt manner, without any attempt to contextualize the speech or comment on his intention. A close examination of the text reveals further inconsistencies and stylistic imperfections (measured against the set of criteria listed in chapter 3):

- (204) repetition of (199), out of context
- (205) sudden switch to the account of the 'assembly incident' which he, moreover, does not detail any further
- (210-11) gap between the announcement of the confession and the repeated lament that he has been criticized
- (211) repetition
- (214-15) repetition
- (219-20) repetition

Moreover, we find frequent hesitation, stuttering and lengthy pauses and a conspicuous uncertainty in finding the right words, all of which are clear indicators of emotional turmoil and linguistic deficiencies.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, there are a number of fallacies in the argumentation: (200): Dismissal of NT's censure on the grounds that he was 'obliged' to work in co-operation – a weak argument given the Berba conception of politics, where it is exemplary

---

<sup>16</sup> It could be argued that as the *chef de village*, YS has got the right to act as a superior and adopt a distinct speech behaviour. Yet, as the chapter on political organisation has shown, any superior, whether informally appointed or officially elected, is only respected and followed if he behaves according to the basic principles of Berba ethics, which includes the subordination of personal ambitions to the communal welfare. Thus, even if YS is theoretically entitled to violate governing speech conventions due to his administrative rank, he will not be pardoned by his audience.

<sup>17</sup> Note the similarities to the indigenous conception of failure in the tradition of storytelling.

conduct and not institutional power which gives a person the right to govern and ensures him the co-operation of his collaborators.

(206-07): Contradiction: while earlier rebuking NT lacking initiative, he now complains that NT did not show up at the assembly, although he himself had initiated it (which in fact invalidates his earlier accusation of a lack of initiative).

(210): For the purpose of defence it is not astute to readily admit to 'having weaknesses' and even agree to 'confess' them, instead of seizing the opportunity and justifying one's behaviour.

(211-15): Instead of remaining on a fact-oriented level, and refuting the allegations by valid arguments, YS makes a helpless attempt to stop the censure by 'forbidding' it and repeating that the mere 'fact' of being accused was unjust.

(216): The speaker remains vague at a point where he could in fact defend himself by listing past efforts and achievements.

(217-20): Similarly, it is not advisable to repeat a censure in a defensive declaration, while putting the only powerful argument in the form of a question.

The frequency of logical inconsistencies is mainly responsible for the fact that YS by and large fails to effectively rebuke the censure (although he had had some time to think about a powerful defence). The major weakness must be seen in a lack of coherence. Unlike his predecessors, who attempt to substantiate their premises before drawing a conclusion, YS heads straight off with his main point, which is to protest against the groundlessness of being attacked that way. The few attempts to bring valid arguments to bear are outnumbered by repeated accusations that the others did "not have the right to criticize". In evaluating YS's speech, the critics do not hide their disapproval:

AC: "Que pensez-vous du discours du *délégué*? Des fois, il me semble que le *délégué* est un peu hésitant, en disant 'hm', 'eh'? Est-ce que c'est une bonne manière de parler?"

NK: "C'est mauvais. Il ne sait pas ce qu'il veut dire."

AC: "Alors, avant de démarrer un discours, on doit toujours savoir par où on veut passer? Ou est-ce qu'on peut le développer en parlant?"



NK: "Tu dois savoir par où tu veux passer. Si tu commences ta parole et tu développes ta pensée en parlant tu seras obligé de faire 'eh, eh, eh'."

In the eyes of the critics, it is the lack of mental preparation ("il ne sait pas ce qu'il veut dire") which results in a hesitating performance of an incoherent text and accounts for the 'bad' quality of the speech ("c'est mauvais"). One of the main reasons for this linguistic failure is a lack of self-control. Instead of taking his time, the speaker reacts emotionally, which in turn prevents him from producing an argument that is powerful but not aggressive. The importance which Berba attach to the conceptualisation of a speech ("tu dois savoir par où tu veux passer") explains the delay with which some orators deliver their point of view. Only a careful preparation allows for the effective application of complex rhetorical strategies which both precondition and gain their effect from a coherently structured text (e.g. introductory *kwankyamə*).

Having closely examined the linguistic features of YS's speech, the critics move on to contemplate further reasons for the speaker's rhetorical weakness:

NK: "Ce que l'autre a dit, il l'a vécu. Et le *délégué* voulait se défendre. C'est pourquoi il a dit 'eh, eh, eh'..."

In the critic's view, it is the truth value of NT's proposition, confirmed by his quality as an eye-witness ("ce que l'autre a dit, il l'a vécu"), which makes his argument compelling and forces the speaker into a defence position. But 'truth' is not the only reason for YS's agitation:

YK: "Il y a certains qui pleurent dans leur coeur, sans les yeux (...) C'est la peur."

NK: "Si quelqu'un a tort et qu'un autre lui dit la vérité – s'il accepte, sans rien dire, ça veut dire qu'il a gâté la chose (i.e. il a tort). (Ici) il y a un (autre) problème: (le *délégué*) sait que nous voulons lui arracher son pouvoir. Donc, il ne peut pas se taire comme ça 'eh, eh, eh'. Il doit lutter."

According to the critics, YS's verbal deficiencies can also be attributed to a genuine fear ("c'est la peur") of losing his position ("(il) sait que nous voulons lui arracher son pouvoir"). This hint at a deeper cause for YS's failure has interesting implications for the notion of quality assessment.

So far the critics have mainly targeted linguistic features. Yet there is another aspect which incurs their disapproval. Not only has the *délégué* failed to deliver an acceptable text, but he has gambled away an invaluable chance to restore at least some of his authority, in spite of the weighty accusations. As "si tu acceptes, ça veut dire que tu as gâté sa chose" indicates, it is common practice and thoroughly appropriate to admit one's defeat in a verbal duel by 'not responding' (implicature of speechlessness, *bə sorə* and *bə di toyeni*). In the present situation, however, things are different, since the debate has moved from a simple quarrel about responsibilities in a pump project to a much more serious question, the question of power and authority in Kotari. Under these circumstances, the village head is expected to make some effort to defend his position in a skilled and dignified manner – a manner worthy of someone who claims the right to be respected and followed ("il doit lutter"). Quality assessment thus takes place on several levels which are not necessarily related. While an orator is valued for the persuasive force of his speech, the addressee is judged by his capacity to retort in an equally forceful manner, even if his case is already lost.

With his poor performance YS further weakens his authority. The first consequences are soon felt, when he is interrupted two times in a rude manner and denied the most elementary rights – the right to an undisturbed delivery and a self-determined closure of his speech. Obviously, YS is not considered an equal speech partner and publicly ridiculed in this way. The Berba readily admit the inappropriateness of their behaviour, yet at the same time consider it as a 'test-case' in which YS has a last chance to prove wrong the allegations and restore at least some of his authority through a powerful defence:

AC: "Tawema a interrompu le délégué brusquement en lui demandant: "Si tu t'arrêtes, il faut dire que tu t'es arrêté." Est-ce que ça se fait ou est-ce que c'est impoli d'interrompre quelqu'un de cette manière?"

NK: "Il pouvait dire: "C'est la limite". Là, il serait proche d'une injure." [laughter].

## 2.12. Sequence 12 (220-57)

NT:

- 220 You are right, it is me who speaks like that.  
221 You say that I am criticizing you.  
222 I have the right to do so.  
223 The assembly of which you talk, did you send me there?  
224 Listen!  
225 Being who you are, I am the one whom you have to send.  
226 If you send me and I see what I see, I will tell you:  
227 "This is what I have seen.  
228 This is how we are going to work."  
229 Having made my report, I will withdraw entirely.  
230 The moment you beat the drum or shout, it is your affair.  
231 I won't inform you any more about our work, but will go and do something myself.  
232 I know that there is someone in charge.  
233 This is why I say the following:  
234 "You are our head, (but) it is you who doesn't work.  
235 I tell you, anything can happen, you know, if you don't work.  
236 I tell you (one thing):  
237 I say: "You don't work!"  
238 You say: "We have been together at the assembly!"  
239 You have beaten the drum, (but) it was the day of Magou [important market close to Kotari], when (you tried) to organize an assembly, saying:  
240 "Let's come together (and talk about) the source of the problem!"  
241 When I arrived, what did I tell you?  
242 I said that the people are busy beating the millet and that they haven't got the time to assemble, I said, in the evening.  
243 The others were at Magou.  
244 They returned home.

- 245 We left (Magou) together, you and me, (but) who should have come home first?
- 246 Me and you, we two, who should have gone home, leaving the other alone?
- 247 Since you (weren't planning to) go home, you could have told us:
- 248 "Dear friend, since I will go to the market, I won't be at home in time, and you have to do the job."
- 249 Here, as we are, if we had convened the people and they had noticed that you weren't back yet, do you (really) think, we wouldn't have been able to hold an assembly?
- 250 We have to defend ourselves for not having completely obeyed the one who is responsible.
- 251 The person in charge is a person in charge.
- 252 I tell you this: "You are here, and (even) if (some people) don't take you seriously, others (do).
- 253 There might be one individual who doesn't respect you, but the majority takes you very seriously."
- 254 I tell you here: "We respect you highly."
- 255 You are our boss, this is why I speak.
- 256 If one single person doesn't take you seriously, don't confuse it (with the rest of us)!
- 257 I tell you how our work should be."

NT affirms and justifies his censure of YS (220-21) before substantiating it both on a general (223-27) and a concrete level (detailed account 238-51). Against his better judgement YS had fixed the assembly on a Sunday, when villagers are usually away at the neighbouring market in the village of Magou. As if that was not enough, YS, who had also left for Magou, was the last to return to Kotari. NT emphatically rejects the reproach of not having held a meeting in his absence. YS had neither ordered nor authorized them to do so. His accusation could therefore only be understood as a somewhat paradoxical reprimand for having respected his authority and not acting without permission. NT concludes in a more conciliatory tone, emphasizing that their lacking initiative was in fact a sign of respect, not laziness or disobedience. His intention was to advise, not to rebuke YS (252-57).

### Discussion:

In comparing the text to NT's earlier speech, it is remarkable how his style has changed. His tone has become much more personal – an adaptation to the direct attack by YS. We note a high frequency of first and second person pronouns, as well as a large number of meta-statements which justify (220, 221, 232, 255) or highlight the act of speaking in a face-to-face interaction (224, 235, 241, 252, 254, 257). Despite his conciliatory intent, however, NT does not fail to substantiate and validate his criticism by considering the problem from a general (incumbency model) and a particular point of view (recollection of the event). The soundness of the censure is toned down by the emphasis on 'co-operation' and the assurance of the members' loyalty. In his speech, NT manages to shift the focus from a personal to a general level, where the rules for future co-operation are set and the grounds for a reconciliation prepared.

### 2.13. Sequence 13 (258-74)

TN:

- 258 [6] *You also know well that if the outer tyre is broken, it is not worth buying a new tube, (for) it will get a hole.*
- 259 [7] *Now, a woman you are not married to is not like your wife.*
- 260 *If you beat her, she will beat you in return, but she will not beat her husband.*
- 261 The well itself has an office.
- 262 You and the village head, you go the same way together.
- 263 In my view, the *délegué* doesn't speak straight.
- 264 If he wants to speak straight, it won't convince anyone.
- 265 As far as I'm concerned, if a non-member comes, I want to sit down and keep my tongue.
- 266 He has beaten the drum and asked them to come together, (but) they have remained silent.
- 267 Do you know anyone who makes the committee advance?
- 268 No one in this village knows his place.
- 269 When the time comes, you don't come and talk before us all.
- 270 Personally, I won't respond.
- 271 It had been said that we had to examine how the women fetch the water from the well.
- 272 Well, have we succeeded (in getting this information)?

- 273 You know that if we twist the tongue (i.e. we don't say anything), we have to drink dirty water.
- 274 [8] *Yet if your lorry stands still, no petrol will be wasted.*"

It is the young TN, who takes the floor. He heads off with two proverbs, the first making the point that it would be futile to cure the symptoms while the source of the evil had not yet been eradicated (258-59), the second predicting resistance against an illegitimate act (260-61). He then switches to prose and questions the credibility of both the work group and its head, the *délégué* (262-65). Whenever an assembly was organized, few people would show up (266) or actively participate in the debate (265), and only few of the decisions were actually realized (271-72). He closes his speech by questioning the necessity of repairing the pump at all. Although it would be an advantage to drink clean water, people should also consider – and it is here that the third proverb comes in – that ‘anything which did not work, did not cause any losses either’ (274).

#### Discussion:

Although TN's speech is revealing in many respects, I will concentrate here on the question of proverb use, since it is this aspect which figures most prominently in the indigenous evaluation. Particularly two points are of interest: the deployment of successive proverbs and the example of a ‘shocking’ proverb.

##### 2.13.1. Proverb clusters

In the indigenous view, the succession of proverbs does not pose any problem, as long as their quality and generic character are not affected:

AC: “Peut-on donner deux proverbes en même temps...?”

YK: “Même dix proverbes! Sous prétexte que ça donne des conseils aux gens.”

NK: “Tu peux les donner et après commencer leur explication.”

Bearing in mind that the principal evaluative criteria of a proverb are its explicability (“explication”) and advisory value (“donner des conseils”), it

becomes evident that the application of several *kwankyamə* in a row may be an effective, yet also very risky enterprise, the more so if it occurs at the beginning of a speech and the proverbs are newly invented (as is the case in the present example). Why? A *kwankyamə* gains its significance from the quality of the relation that prevails between proverb and context situation. To start off with a proverb poses the problem that the listener has no clues as to the referential context and will hence find it difficult to guess the intended meaning (provided that the proverb does not refer to the preceding speech). It is therefore advisable to immediately follow it up with an exegesis which provides the 'solution to the riddle' and discloses the missing analogies. The more delayed, complex or ambiguous the explanatory part – as in the case of successive proverbs – the more complicated the transfer and speculative the guess as to the intended meaning. The result is likely to leave the audience puzzled or annoyed, instead of enlightened, and will earn the speaker bad marks:

NK (in reference to the first *kwankyamə*): "Moi, je ne comprends pas, même le sens de ce proverbe-là. Je comprends le proverbe mais je ne sais pas par où il veut passer."

To NK, the proverb's literal meaning is evident, yet the relation between *kwankyamə* and the context situation remains obscure.<sup>18</sup> Despite their lack of comprehension, however, critics are kindly disposed to the speaker and attribute the failure to verbal incompetence and not hypocrisy. KY even contemplates the source of inspiration for the proverb (which is new to him) and indirectly affirms the truth value on the literal level:

KY: "Peut-être avait-il acheté un chambre-à-air neuve et son pneu-il était fatigué? Certains rencontrent des difficultés (et) [...] en profitent (pour inventer des) des proverbes."

---

<sup>18</sup> A possible interpretation could read: if the head of the group is 'rotten', any effort on the part of the group will be in vain. Yet, there is no clear hint at an analogy which would corroborate this interpretation.

The way in which KY approaches the proverb reminds us very much of the systematics by which proverbs are decoded and interpreted in a proverb discussion.

### 2.13.2. Bad or shocking proverbs

The second point of interest concerns the evaluation of proverb [7] and [8]. Unlike the first *kwankyamə*, critics have a clear, albeit not uniform, idea about the proverbs' intended meaning. The assessment centres around the proverb's propositional content. Let us first look at *kwankyamə* [7] whose applied meaning is translated with "Il voulait qu'on recupère l'argent le même jour." The reaction is decidedly negative:

NK: "Si on était là avec l'assemblée du village, il aurait eu des problèmes. Il allait même inciter certains de ne pas cotiser, parce qu'il a dit tout d'abord: "Si tu frappes une femme qui ne t'appartient pas, elle doit te frapper aussi". Maintenant, si tu vas chez quelqu'un demander l'argent, il va te répondre pareillement."

The critic does not hide his anger. He rejects the proverb on the ground that it would arm those already hesitant to pay with a witty response to justify their refusal when members of the groupement would come to collect the money ("si tu vas chez quelqu'un..."). In this view, the spreading of such ideas was highly dangerous since it risked undermining the group's activity and calling into question their efforts to secure the water supply of the village.

For some critics there is no doubt that the speaker is well aware of the provocative content. Why else would he have placed the proverb in the beginning and abstained from a lengthy exegesis if it was not from fear of an early interruption. Being cautious in one respect, however, does not prevent TN from using another proverb *kwankyamə* [6], which evokes an even greater uproar – at least amongst some members of the audience. The following assessment is revealing in so far as it conveys an idea of the diversity of perspectives by which one and the same proverb may be approached and



evaluated. Let us begin with those statements which accord *kwankyamə* [6] a good quality:

YM: "Il a dit: "Si ton vehicule ne marche pas, le niveau d'essence ne baissera pas. C'est vrai. C'est bien, parce que si ton vehicule parcourt une certaine distance tu n'auras plus d'essence."

AC: "Qu'est-ce que vous autres en pensez?"

DK: "Il a bien parlé, parce qu'il a donné conseil aux gens: 'Si un *délégué* ne travaille pas il faut chaque fois le tirer et le lui dire pour qu'il comprenne.' "

As the statements reveal, the proverb is appreciated for two reasons: its truth value, evinced in the explicability of the proverb on the literal level ("...c'est vrai. C'est bien, parce que...") and its advisory quality proved by its meaningful application to the context situation. According to DK, the analogy 'car : lazy village head' and 'endless petrol supply : endless criticism' translates into 'if a *délégué* is not performing well, you must criticize him'. Despite DK's positive reading, however, it must be noted that the analogy has considerable shortcomings, which in fact challenge her reading. The main weakness rests in the analogy of 'petrol : criticism'. While petrol is an indispensable and 'natural' part of a car, the 'natural' attitude of a work group would be 'co-operation', not 'rebuke'. The more suitable analogy to 'censure', then, would be 'repairing a car'. And indeed, DK's interpretation is not shared by the rest of the group. It is YK who summarizes how he and the other critics understand the proverb's intended meaning: "Il voulait aussi que la pompe soit fermée!". This interpretative shift has significant repercussions on the notion of quality:

NK: "Le proverbe même est intéressant. Mais il a insulté les gens. C'est un proverbe choquant!"

In his judgement, NK draws a clear distinction between the quality on the literal and that on the applied level. While he appreciates the originality of the proverb situation and the potential of the abstract principle contained in it ("le proverbe

même est intéressant”), he emphatically rejects the proposition of the intended message and dismisses the *kwankyamə* as ‘shocking’. Why?

NK: “Ce que TN a dit, ça détruit tout ce que les gens ont dit au début de la réunion!”

AC: “Pourquoi?”

NK: “Ce qu’il a dit – si on se réunit pendant des heures et une personne dit cela, ça détruit tout ce qu’on a cousu [...] Il a même dit que les groupements ne fonctionnent pas. Pour lui c’est le *délégué* qui a raison. Il souhaiterait qu’on ferme la pompe alors qu’au moment où on s’était réuni on avait dit que ce n’était pas bien de fermer la pompe. Il faut collecter l’argent pour être capable de payer des réparations. Mais celui-là a détruit tout ça. Ce n’est pas bien. C’est pourquoi il a donné le proverbe: “Si le véhicule s’arrête, l’essence ne finit pas.”? Cela veut dire, si on ne puise pas l’eau pour la pompe, l’eau ne finira pas. Alors que la pompe était arrivé pour dépanner les gens!...”

Filled with indignation, NK lists a whole range of damnable points: First, by questioning the necessity of repairing a pump in general, TN provides YS with a clever argumentative twist that would not only excuse his lack of engagement but even rationalize it as a deliberate decision with the aim to ensure the future water supply. Secondly, he flouts the maxim of constructiveness in several ways by a) calling into question earlier decisions, b) ridiculing the members of the association and their work by pointing to the worthlessness of their decisions, c) undermining their authority by backing someone who is lazy and deserves some heavy criticism, d) jeopardizing the well being of the village by arguing against the repair of the pump, and with it accepting a limited water supply.

To NK, then, the proverb therefore constitutes a clear instance of rhetorical failure, exhibiting moral impropriety and a lack of social competence. TN has perverted the explicative function of a *kwankyamə* and abused its persuasive force for counterproductive ends.

What clearly emerges from the indigenous evaluative discourse, is how differently the same proverb can be viewed, depending on the point of reference (literal or applied level), the comprehension of the individual terms and the recognition of the analogic relations that prevail between the proverb and context situation. It confirms what has been noted in the chapter on proverb theory, namely that 'good' or 'bad/ shocking' are not intrinsic qualities of a *kwankyama*, but depend on the listener's perception and the context of usage.

#### 2.14. Sequence 14 (275-371)

ND:

275 "What you want to say is the following:

276 [9] *"The day of the preparation of millet beer, the beer will spoil (if the ferment was bad).*

277 *If you have some light beer (i.e. ferment), the beer will always be light on the day of its preparation.*

278 Now, while we are sitting here, it is as if we were judging something.

279 Let it be!

280 While we are sitting here, we don't judge.

281 If we wanted to judge we would see that many (of us) are wrong.

282 *Hee, (take) a man like him!*

283 I am not saying Sambieni works.

284 He doesn't do his job.

285 When you ask him to tell the truth, to list the things which have been realized, if he (the village head) counts (i.e. lists the things), you will see whether he works!

286 Since you work, it is up to him (to justify himself).

287 If you have entrusted someone with a job and he doesn't do it, you have the right to call together an assembly and to call him to account.

288 You can tell him to beat the drum.

289 It is not that you could write and say: "This or that day I have asked you to do this or that thing, (but) you haven't done it."

290 The way you are (i.e. illiterate as you are), you take (what he has done) and compare (it with) what he has said.

291 You discuss (it) and you may say, "You see, this person is not right."

292 As there is no paper (i.e. since no one knows how to write) you  
will all speak.  
293 What is shameful for a man?  
294 It is there where it is dark (i.e. here is the rub).  
295 [10] *You see that the feet work more than (exceed) the head.*  
296 Why?  
297 Sambieni knows well that you are strong.  
298 He knows that you are mature in your job.  
299 This is why he doesn't care about your work.  
300 He knows that you all are mature.  
301 There have been some things which you should have obliged him  
to do.  
302 Since he realized that you don't oblige him and you do your job,  
(he realized that) you are mature.  
303 He holds you all in esteem because of your maturity.  
304 This is what I wanted to add."

MB:

305 "Hee, if we sit down tonight in order to discuss everyone's  
behaviour, I will go home.  
306 We have met in order to discuss the pump, the road and various  
other topics.  
307 You have touched on 'various other issues' before coming to the  
points of today's schedule."

ND:

308 "If we have touched on 'various other issues', we have finished  
them off now.  
309 You see (agree) that the affair doesn't exist any longer.  
310 If we achieve an accord, this will not happen again."

MB:

311 "Tò!  
312 As we have stopped here already, I will talk about the pump.  
313 We haven't resolved the problem yet.  
314 As I've said, we have waited, since there was too much work.  
315 The drum must be beaten.  
316 A person can't tour around like that and collect some money.  
317 I say, I can't go to someone if I'm not sure that everyone has  
been informed before.  
318 Tò!  
319 One day, we will go out and form the groups."

ND:

320 "No, no, it is the drum which must be beaten!"

MB:

321 "If the drum is beaten, we will split up into (several) groups and spread out.

322 None of us knows how to write.

323 When you have toured (around the villages), you will come home in the evening.

324 You will report what you have experienced on your tour.

325 I think that this is all concerning the pump."

ND:

326 "What he has suggested – since the drum hasn't yet been beaten, when will it speak?

327 Is it the mountain of Kotari which will beat (the drum) and tell us?"

MB:

328 "Tó!

329 I say that (and) I don't know whether or not the workload is too much."

ND:

330 "The responsibility is with us, with us, the committee (of the well) and the village head."

NT:

331 "For me, this is an assembly where, I think, we shouldn't argue that much.

332 This evening we have come together.

333 We have tackled (the problem and) discussed the issue until now.

334 We discuss the question before we repair (anything).

335 If it is not broken, we won't repair (it).

336 I am the head of the committee (of the well), you, the people who work, you are the eyes of this village.

337 Today we will go home and know the day when the drum will be beaten.

338 We have to know that, when the drum is beaten, it is the day when we have to go out (and collect the money).

339 Everyone, woman, man, 250 CFA.

340 If you go and someone beats you, you have to leave him and come back.

341 We will see how we will manage in all the villages.

342 After the drum has been beaten, we will see (fix) the day, when  
we are going to collect the money.”

NN:

343 “I would like to know: If every man must pay 250 CFA, does  
every woman also have to pay 250 CFA?”

NT:

344 “It’s all the same.

345 One has to pay just like the last time.”

NN:

346 “Each compound 250 CFA.”

NT:

347 “No! If there are ten people in a compound, each person has to  
pay 250 CFA.

348 Each head pays.”

ND:

349 “This (issue) is settled.

350 We should tackle the next point.

351 You should propose a date!”

MS:

352 “Tomorrow is the market of Matéri (i.e. Thursday), the day after  
that is a Friday, the day after that a Saturday.

353 Which day do you chose?”

NT:

354 “We could beat the drum on Friday.

355 If we beat it on Friday, what will happen on Saturday?”

MB:

356 “If we want to beat (the drum), we have to beat it at the village  
centre.

357 When we beat it on Friday, the one who has something to sell,  
will prepare himself for Saturday.

358 He can go and sell it at the market of Magou, yóó!

359 On Monday morning, we must come together and begin our tour  
(around the villages).”

NT:

360 The coming Monday?

MB:

361 "But there is a problem with the money!

362 Will it work out, when there is no market before (where to earn some money)?"

NT:

363 [11] "*One eats the sauce of the lizard when it is hot.*"

ND:

364 [12] "*If the drum is hot, the dance is hot as well.*"

MS:

365 "It (i.e. the drum) must announce the day of the meeting."

NT:

366 There will be no more meeting.

367 The drum will announce the day of the collection of the money.

MB:

368 "I am alive, I haven't yet died.

369 Needless to stress that I am old and that it is hard to [unclear recording].

370 I am old."

ND:

371 "You should deliver the second point."

A peaceful accord is established, at least superficially, and a decision made regarding the collection of the money. Once again, ND in his role as an arbitrator shifts the focus away from the conflict between NT and YS, and underscores instead the necessity of co-operation in the interest of a secure water supply. For illustrative purposes he draws on the imagery of bad millet beer, whose poor quality would be due to a bad ferment used during its preparation. In other words, if the group was to work efficiently ("good beer") it would have to avoid internal quarrels and settle their disputes as quickly as possible ("no bad ferment"). He concludes his speech by confirming his view that any lack of initiative on the part of the *délégué* was just a proof of his trust in the members of the group. In the final section, the resolution of the conflict is

formally stated and an agreement reached as regards the date for the collection of the money. Two light-hearted proverbs end this part.

### **3. Conclusion**

The case study demonstrates several points: First, it offers a unique opportunity to observe 'politics in action'. By occurring on two levels – in addition to the organisation of the pump's repair, the tense relation between the village head and the local population is at stake – the debate not only illustrates the problems inherent in any consensus-oriented policy but also exemplifies the conception of power and authority in segmentary societies.

Secondly, it validates the findings of chapter 3 regarding notions of quality and skill in language use in political settings. The evaluative discourse is anchored in Berba political ideology, featuring 'constructiveness' as its principal criterion. Respectively, contributions fostering the exchange of ideas and the solution of conflicts are acclaimed. The assessment concerns the textual and contextual level and compounds linguistic and moral aspects. On the textual level, it is persuasive argumentation, lucid diction and a reconciliatory mode of speech which are most highly esteemed (sequences 2, 3, 4, 8, 9). On the contextual level, the approval is for those elements which serve to organize the course of debate, such as the presentation of a schedule, the employment of turn-taking markers and framing devices, and the contextualisation of the individual speech act through cross-references (sequences 1, 2, 6, 7, 9). The notion of rhetorical failure follows accordingly. The gravest objections are to those speeches which impede the exchange of ideas and thwart the decision-making process. 'Incoherence', 'redundancy' and 'insufficient explication' as well as 'counterproductive statements' and 'deliberate ridicule' are the main targets of critique (sequences 11 and 13).

Thirdly, it corroborates the thesis of an interconnection between different modes of speaking through recurrent features and patterns of speech activity. To begin with, there is the relation between proverb speaking and political language. It is defined in terms of conjunctures (one speech mode being deployed in another one ) and centred around functional-referential properties.



Throughout the debate, a total of twelve *kwankyamə* are employed. Ten of them take a crucial function in shaping both the individual discourse and the course of the debate [proverbs 1-10]. In five cases they essentially contribute to the success of a speech [1, 3, 4, 9 and 10]. The high frequency of proverb use can be attributed to the fact that the generic properties of *kwankyamə* render them suitable devices to meet the speech conventions governing language use in a political debate. Their truth value serves to validate, their explicative value to elucidate a point of view [1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12]. In some cases, proverbs even constitute arguments in their own right [4 and 8]. Speakers reinforce their persuasive value by adjusting the imagery to the background of experience of the addressee (examples are the imagery of 'hunting' [1, 5], 'wife' [3, 4, 7] or 'riding a bicycle' [6], all of them male concerns in a group which is exclusively composed of men). Moreover, the generic framework of a *kwankyamə* provides for its elaboration in the service of clarity and comprehensibility (e.g. if the speaker does not consider the addressee witty enough to grasp its intended meaning). Examples are [1] and [4]. The analogic character of a *kwankyamə*, in turn, renders it an ideal means to comply with the second central requirement, that of conflict-management. An impressive example is provided in sequence 4, where a complex non-attributive proverb serves to mitigate a serious censure.

The second interconnection can be established between political language and storytelling. Unlike proverb speaking, it does not consist of conjunctures (tales being deployed as rhetorical figures in a political discourse) but in similarities on the structural level. As the analyses in chapter 4 and 6 reveal, the success in either mode of speaking is predicated essentially upon the production of a carefully structured and coherent text, although for different reasons. To persuasively argue a case in a public debate, premises and conclusions must be interwoven into a consistent whole (sequences 2 and 4). Likewise, the technique of 'implicature' as a device of indirectness requires the careful structuring of a text, with an even discussion of the two opposite points of view from which the implied message (critique, argument) naturally emerges (sequence 9). This recalls the tradition of storytelling, where the delivery of a coherent text is one of the preconditions to warrant the desired effect of 'tension-release' and

provide for cognitive satisfaction through an insightful conclusion which cogently follows from the main text. The similarities in structural features are paralleled by striking similarities in behavioural conventions which further the rhetorical ideal. Interruption or any other disturbance of the speaker is considered inappropriate. Neither are histrionic or mimetic elements required for the performance of a Berba tale, nor are paralinguistic means greatly favoured in the delivery of a political discourse. Another recurrence concerns the use of narrative strategies in political language. Examples are the rendition of an 'objective' account (sequence 2) or the deployment of 'fiction' as a device of indirectness (sequence 9). Their style and structure recall features characteristic of storytelling, such as the use of straightforward diction, the renunciation of descriptive or evaluative elements, and a high frequency of direct and reported speech.

The last point leads to a final issue, also raised at the beginning of this study: it regards the possible implications of cross-generic interrelations for the individual speech economy. As a comparison of chapters 3, 4 and 5 reveals, the similarities in structural-functional properties are paralleled by the skills required to master the genres. For the individual speaker this could mean that, (once) having acquired a certain competence in one mode of speaking, such as the traditions of storytelling and/ or proverb speaking, he could usefully draw on this knowledge to succeed in another domain: storytelling, performed and enjoyed as an art for art's sake, would teach the speaker how to conceive and deliver coherent texts, discipline his diction and so provide him with skills that could render him valuable services at a later stage under more 'serious' circumstances, such as a public assembly. From this point of view, the notion of creativity firmly anchored in the tradition of storytelling gains a new significance. Likewise, proverb competence could be perfected under most varied circumstances before being employed in a public speech. By participating in proverb discussions, a speaker could consolidate his analogic competence, improve his faculty to decode and explain a proverb's meaning (technique of exegesis) and supply himself with new metaphors and maxims; the use of proverbs in discursive speech contexts – a flirt, debate, verbal duel or even an arbitration session – would help him to enhance his context-sensitivity and

improve his social and creative skills (inspire him to improvise new proverbs).<sup>19</sup> Admittedly, it is not linguistic skills alone which make a respected figure in local politics. He or she must also exhibit a certain interest in communal affairs, being intelligent, self-controlled and displaying a high degree of social competence. Moreover, a person should not shy away from speaking in public (due to inferior social status, for example). Thus, to employ certain skills acquired in the domains of storytelling or proverb speaking does not necessarily guarantee an influential position in local politics. But it may well be an advantage.

---

<sup>19</sup> To start from the notion of individual skill has another implication regarding speech genres and their constitutive elements. Usually perceived as integral parts of ontological entities (Ben-Amos 1976: x1; Finnegan, 1992: 135-45), generic properties now occur as dynamic linguistic resources available and exploitable in various speech domains for various ends.

## Appendix 1: Tale 1 [*ipama*]

Storyteller: M. Emmanuel Idani

Date: Matéri, 10 October 1992

- 1     *swomba swomba*  
I am telling a story.  
  
[*pore nampo*]  
[audience: We are ready.]
- 2     *bega nyi bo bəkaru u pwahau, də nya də ywagəsau də bə wagəhamə.*  
The *bega* had married and so had the poor man with whom he lived.
- 3     *bə pwobə sandə bisi.*  
The women gave birth to children.
- 4     *bega pa u yiegə hiri betə laywoi.*  
The *bega* named his child *laywoi* (that is ‘the one with the big head’).
- 5     *ywagəsa pa u yiegəbətə ipama.*  
The poor man named his child *ipama*.
- 6     *də kwani manse mani bə bo nyana, də si: you, bega awe a sa, sandə bigə bə kə pa laywoi, awe bega wa?*  
The leper who stayed with (the *bega*), said: “*Yó* (exclamation indicating astonishment), *bega*, you, who has fathered a child, you name your child *laywoi*, you, the *bega*?”
- 7     *ywagəsau u ywagəsə saləma, sa, sandə bigə bə kə pa ipama.*  
The poor man, who is so poor as you can possibly imagine, has become a father like you and has called his child *ipama*.
- 8     *kwana si: u tema, ipama ha u tə ningə pa kə palə.*  
The leper said: “*ipama* means ‘nothing can happen to you’ (i.e. the invincible).”
- 9     *bə tə: a yasi dəkə ma.*  
He said: “You should make something happening to him (i.e. something that will defeat him).”
- 10    *bega si: nəm tiendə dəkə ma?*  
The *bega* said: “What can I do?”

- 11 *kwani si: a pire nalagə bə kə mwanə kəm sanu di turu.*  
The leper said: "Take a bull and entrust it to him, and the bull shall bear calves (which are then to be) shared."
- 12 *bega pire nalagə bə mwanə ipama.*  
The *bega* took a bull and handed it over to *ipama*.
- 13 *bə tə: ma pwala.*  
He said: "I entrust it to you.
- 14 *kən sanu də tə turu.*  
When it reproduces (calves) we will share them."
- 15 *ipama kyigərə nalagə bə hui bə hubə u kyankyani.*  
*ipama* took the bull, returned home and tethered it at his house.
- 16 *kugə wum ha ipama si supi bə tei bəm pise bega pənwoğə nyahe.*  
At cockcrow, *ipama* got up and went to the *bega*'s millet field.
- 17 *bə kyendə bən homə do wegu bə yagə ko ko.*  
He started to cut dry wood and it made *kó, kó*.
- 18 *bega pwobə n karu bən yo də lə yagə.*  
The *bega*'s wives passed by and heard the noise.
- 19 *nyamə bə si: yo, ipama, də a pala?*  
Hearing that (the noise) they said: "Yó, *ipama*, what are you doing?"
- 20 *ipama si: yo, n, yieməm nwa pinwa u sage.*  
*ipama* said: "I am doing it not in vain.
- 21 *pə yorə nwa.*  
I am not mad.
- 22 *mpwei n səm sandə yagu simə kangi*  
My father who has born a child tonight is freezing.
- 23 *ndə mwanəm də homa də a bwomsi bə nage hui bə u mwanə.*  
That is why I have come to cut *bwomsi* (i.e. large pieces of wood for an ill person, in particular women in childbed) and bring it home for him."
- 24 *bega pwobə si: ywau, ipama, a syeli dabə sanəla?*  
The *bega*'s wives said: "Ywau, *ipama*, at your village, men (actually) bear children?"

- 25 *ipama si: ywau, mfwā.*  
*ipama* said: “Ywāu [exclamation indicating satisfaction], I am pleased.
- 26 *dabē pē sanhu bega san mwanē nalagē bētē kē sanu?*  
 Men do not bear children, (but) the *bega* entrusted me with a bull and said that it should bear (calves)?”
- 27 *bega pwobē hui bu kyegī.*  
 The *bega*’s wives reported to (their husband) what (*ipamā*) had said.
- 28 *bega si: ha teini yin kyigērē nalagē.*  
 The *bega* said: “Go and bring the bull back to me.”
- 29 *bētei ipama hubērē nalagē bēbē mwane.*  
 They returned and brought it back to the *bega*.
- 30 *bega si: to.*  
 The *bega* said: “Tó!”
- 31 *kwani si ha: bigē, kē pwam kēdu di kē mā.*  
 The leper said: “This child – whether he wants it or not, something will happen to him.
- 32 *a pirē iyia bē kē mwane ka, busē yagē, banyagē yagē, ba derē yagē, a wei yagē, kē samē daam, yagē n nya yagē ka wusi nyamē.*  
 Take some millet, give it to him (and order him) to put it in water today, to let it germ today, to dry it today, to prepare millet beer today and to invite you for a drink today.”
- 33 *bē pirē iyia bē mwane bigē.*  
 (The *bega*) took the millet and gave it to the child.
- 34 *ipama mansē pirē yāni bē mwane begau.*  
*ipama* took (some) seeds of the calabash plant and gave them to the *bega*.
- 35 *bē tē dakwotu myese.*  
 He said: “The seed is ripe.
- 36 *begau u kwahi yanhu hu yei yagē bē sandē piri yagē.*  
 The *bega* shall plant the calabash plant, the plant shall sprout and give fruit today.

- 37 *u manu dakwale pira, n kwatə daam.*  
He shall bring it to (the place where the) the prepared millet beer (is deposited), so I may pour it (into the calabash)."
- 38 *bega si: teisu i n kyegərənī n, yaani.*  
The *bega* said: "Go (away) and take back the seeds of the calabash plant."
- 39 *kwani si: magəri lə bigə nyangə də pa kə ma.*  
The leper said: "This is indeed a child to whom nothing can happen."
- 40 *kwani yegətə: bigə a ka kə pwam kə du di kə ma.*  
The leper added: "This child does not want anything or anything bad."
- 41 *di tyendə bə kə ma!*  
This is why something must happen to him."
- 42 *bega sə ha: di kə ma kəntə?*  
The *bega* said: "How can it happen?"
- 43 *kwani sə ha: a pitə a ywagəm bəkə mwane.*  
The leper said: "Take off your ring and give it to him."
- 44 *bega pitə ywagəm n ha bə mwane ipama.*  
The *bega* pulled off the ring and gave it to *ipama*.
- 45 *də yagu tən sibə, u pitə ywagəm bə mure u nui nyahe.*  
When night fell and it became dark, (*ipama*) took off the ring and put it into his mouth.
- 46 *bega twonə dooru sai.*  
The *bega* sent all the animals (to *ipama*).
- 47 *bə tə tə tei, bə yurəm ywagəm.*  
He told them to go and steal the ring!
- 48 *tə tinə tei tə pə nyampə ywagəm.*  
They went off to get the ring.
- 49 *dare ipama mure u ywagəm.*  
(But) *ipama* had put the ring into his mouth.
- 50 *u m bo bo ha bə twonə napekyakyahu.*  
Finally, a bat was sent.

- 51 *napekyakyanhu nində bə yensi hu pə nyampə.*  
The bat arrived (but) did not find (the ring).
- 52 *hu si: a! bari?*  
It said: "Ah! What is it (that I should not be able to find it)?"
- 53 *hu tə nyame bə twaherə namitu ipama nui nyahe.*  
It spat into *ipama*'s mouth.
- 54 *ipama twaherə ywagəm desu byagi twali.*  
*ipama* coughed and the ring fell to the other side (out of his mouth).
- 55 *napekyakyanhu tei be kyore.*  
The bat picked it up.
- 56 *bə hui bə mwanə begau u ywagəm.*  
It took the ring back to the *bega*.
- 57 *kwani sə ha: nywagəm a mum a tei bənkam barə kyetu nyahe.*  
The leper said: "Take the ring and throw it into the great river.
- 58 *kə pwa yegə n nyampə lanyini.*  
(The child) will never find it."
- 59 *bega pire bə tei magi barə kyetu nyahe bə kam.*  
The *bega* took the ring, went straight to the great river and threw it into (the river).
- 60 *sam nə legu u twonə bigə.*  
At dawn he sent for a child.
- 61 *bə tə: kə tei bə kyigerənə u wagəm dare kugə umə ha ipama.*  
He told him to go to *ipama* and tell him to bring back the ring at cockcrow.
- 62 *si bib bəm pa u nebə yahe.*  
But (*ipama*) had left to see his mother's brother.
- 63 *bə nində bən nwa u nebə dyebə pugə yantangu.*  
When he arrived there, he saw his uncle fishing.
- 64 *də bə mwehi yansi də sə wosi mageri.*  
He had caught a lot of fish.



- 65 *bə si: ywau! ipama a tegə nari.*  
He said: "Ywau, *ipama*, you are lucky!"
- 66 *bə si: a nindəni bən nwa yansi bo.*  
He said: "You have come to see the fish over here."
- 67 *ipama si: m manse i pusəna i welə.*  
(*ipama*) said: "I have come to pay you a visit."
- 68 *nə sa nyampə tahi ala də yelə.*  
I have seen (what you have got there) and it is good."
- 69 *bə sə ha: tei a karə a yansi bə hui mwane pwobə sahe.*  
(His uncle) said: "Then take a fish and ask the women at home (to prepare it for you)."
- 70 *ipama mani bə nyampə yankyetəka n ba bekə bə pə mwam.*  
*ipama* came and saw a fat fish, a big one which was deposited there.
- 71 *ha bətə bugəbi.*  
He took it.
- 72 *bə tə: to! n hui lə.*  
He said: "Tó, I am going home."
- 73 *bə sə ha: pwam hui pwobə a saha.*  
(His uncle) said: "Don't you want to go there where there are women to prepare it?"
- 74 *ipama si: m ba du huilə.*  
*ipama* said: "I will go to my own house."
- 75 *u huni bə pirə yangə nyangə bə kə pitə bə nyampə ywagəm nyaməm kə dosi nyahe.*  
When he arrived home, *ipama* took the fish, sliced it and saw the ring inside the belly.
- 76 *u pirə bega nywagəm bə byelə.*  
He took the *bega*'s ring and put it aside.
- 77 *bega twohəni bə tə: tei ipama yaha bən kyigərənə, nywagəm.*  
The *bega* sent (a child) to *ipama* and said: "Go to *ipama* and get back the ring."

- 78 *bigə nində ha.*  
The child arrived (at *ipama*'s house).
- 79 *ipama pīrə bega nywagəm ha bu mwanə.*  
*ipama* took the *bega*'s ring and gave it to him.
- 80 *bigə hui ha bə mwanə begau u nywagəm.*  
The child returned and handed back the ring to the *bega*.
- 81 *u si: ywau! nywagəm nyaməm m ba læ.*  
(The *bega*) said: "Ywáu, this is the ring, indeed!"
- 82 *bega pīrə nywagəm ha bə pigi kwani.*  
The *bega* took the ring and showed it to the leper.
- 83 *kwani: ywau! bigə nyankə mageri læ.*  
The leper: "Ywáu! This child is a special child!"
- 84 *bega si: də pwa kə ma.*  
The *bega* said: "And nothing happens to him."
- 85 *kwani sə ha: di kə ma.*  
The leper said: "Something bad will happen to him!"
- 86 *bega si: di tyendə kə ma?*  
The *bega* said: "How will it happen?"
- 87 *də sə ha: mwanə pwobə busə iyia.*  
(The leper) said: "The wives have to put millet into water.
- 88 *bə busə iyia wei bə samə dáám.*  
They must soak the millet, then dry it in order to brew millet beer."
- 89 *də si: dáám da timə lai i tei kə wusi.*  
(The leper) said: "At *datimə lai* (i.e. the second day of fermentation of the beer which is called *datimə* at that stage), go and send for (*ipama*)."
- 90 *bə bwote fwarəhu bə kwanə kyagə ninu bə puhe.*  
They dug a hole, fetched the pot and placed it in (there).
- 91 *bən kwalu datimə bə kumə nyahe.*  
They poured the hot *datimə* into it (the pot).

- 92 *ipama mansə dutən fwaru u yahe bæ manə bæ kyorə kyagə.*  
*ipama*, (in turn), dug a tunnel just to the place where the pot was deposited.
- 93 *bə karə u sarəhu bən bomə.*  
 He (then) found some bark to cover its opening.
- 94 *də bæ tən kwatə datimə ha bæ kwondə kyagə.*  
 They scooped the *datimə* and poured it into the pot.
- 95 *ipama mansə mani bæ pyegu u kyafwana bæ hunənu u yahe.*  
*ipama* scooped the *datimə* (in another pot) and took it home.
- 96 *bən kwatə sani datimə sai bæ wase bæ pirə kalapwogə bæ walə kyagə nyahe.*  
 Having scooped the entire *datimə*, they fetched a white cloth to cover the hole.
- 97 *dare ipama tose daam sai bæ hunənu u yahe.*  
 Meanwhile *ipama* had carried all the millet beer home.
- 98 *bega twonə bigə bətə: a te bæ kyegi ipama u mani.*  
 The *bega* sent a child (to *ipama*) and said: "Go and invite *ipama* to my house!"
- 99 *ipama nində ha bæ tē ui ham tihe.*  
*ipama* arrived and wanted to sit down on the ground.
- 100 *bə si: ipama a hani, kwa la.*  
 (The *bega*) said: "*ipama*, your place is not here.
- 101 *tei a ham a la.*  
 Go and sit down over there!"
- 102 *ipama si: n hani lama.*  
*ipama* said: "My place (is) here!"
- 103 *bə sē: kei a hani nwa nyan.*  
 (The *bega*) said: "No, your place is there!"
- 104 *ipama si: pwam tum nwansu.*  
*ipama* said: "We cannot argue the whole time!"

- 105 *bə tei bə ham də sə fwobə.*  
He sat down and fell (into the hole).
- 106 *kwani si: tei pwom, bə tei bə pwom pwom!*  
The leper said: "Go and beat against the pot, beat firmly!"
- 107 *kwani si: swanə!*  
The leper said: "It is over with him!"
- 108 *yapene panə ha ipama twonə bisi.*  
In the evening *ipama* sent some children to the *bega*.
- 109 *bə tə i tei bə kyagi bega u mani bə nya bworəsi.*  
He told them to go to the *bega* and tell him to come and drink *bworəsi* (i.e. first try of the newly brewed beer, reserved for elders, most prestigious drink, served in a special calabash)."
- 110 *bigə nindəni bətə: mpweu yagə bə nya bworəsi.*  
The child arrived (at the *bega*'s compound) and said: "My father (i.e. label of respect for anyone elder than oneself) invites (you) to drink *bworəsi*."
- 111 *bega si: a pweu, wetə?*  
The *bega* said: "Your father? Who?"
- 112 *bigə si: ipama.*  
The child said: "*ipama*."
- 113 *bega si: ipama, wetə?*  
The *bega* said: "*ipama*, who?"
- 114 *təm pwom we bə nagərə ala.*  
We have beaten him to death in the pot!"
- 115 *bigə si: u hanə kyankyani.*  
The child said: "He is at home!"
- 116 *bega yise ha.*  
The *bega* got up.
- 117 *bə nində, bən nwam ipama ham.*  
When he arrived (at the compound of *ipama*) he saw *ipama* sitting there.

- 118 *ipama pirə bworəsi bə nya.*  
*ipama* took some *bworəsi* (and offered him a) drink.
- 119 *u hui ha bə tə: magerə bigə nyangə də pwa kə ma.*  
 (The *bega*) went home and said: "Indeed, this child is invincible."
- 120 *kwani si: də kə ma.*  
 The leper said: "Something will happen to him!"
- 121 *saam dere bega yatə bə nya u dáám.*  
 The following morning the *bega* came home from a drinking-bout.
- 122 *kwani sə ha: i sə twonə kyou bə pirə sansi dya, bə sə mwana.*  
 The leper said: "Give the children two horses and send them (the children) on the road.
- 123 *bə pirə magera i sangə bə dogə u i ipama.*  
 Take the true horse (i.e. that of the *bega*) and put *ipama* on his back."
- 124 *u, bə yatə bə pirə u bigə dyesə bu bare.*  
 (The *bega*) also gave (*ipama*) his own shirt.
- 125 *bə manse pirə sambumə bə dogə laywoi.*  
 He took a horse, small like a goat, and asked *laywoi* to mount it.
- 126 *sə yisə bəmpapa ipama nwase laywoi.*  
 On their ride, *ipama* stopped *laywoi*.
- 127 *bə tə: laywoi! a nwam bega bigə dən nwam ywagəsa bigə.*  
 He said: "*laywoi*! You are the *bega*'s child and I am the poor man's child.
- 128 *bən tə twonə kyou a hu ha.*  
 They have sent us on the road.
- 129 *bə tə twonə bega two yahe.*  
 They have sent us to another *bega*.
- 130 *də kwantə nu n ha də tə nində bə mandə bega bigə, bə mandə ywagəsa yiege.*  
 When we arrive, they will recognize the child of the *bega*, they will recognize the son of the poor man.

- 131 *swanswama də tə ninda, bæ i te n de bega bigə də a də ywagəsa bigə.*  
When we arrive, they will say that I am the child of the *bega* and you are the poor man's child."
- 132 *ipama batə bega batu bæ mwanə laywoi.*  
*ipama* took off the clothes of the *bega* (and) gave them to *laywoi*.
- 133 *laywoi mansə batə bæ n yi læ barə ywagəsa batu bæ mwanə ipama u.*  
*laywoi*, in turn, took off the clothes of the poor man, and gave them to *ipama*.
- 134 *laywoi pire sambum ha bæ mwanə ipama.*  
*laywoi* took the small horse and gave it to *ipama*.
- 135 *u ipama mansə pirə begə sangə bæ mwanə laywoi.*  
*ipama*, in turn, took the *bega*'s horse and gave it to *laywoi*.
- 136 *bə sa dou bæ dyesu bəm pa.*  
Both mounted (the horses again) and continued their way.
- 137 *bə nində bega yahe bæ kyandi bæ di.*  
When they arrived at the *bega*'s house, they were welcomed and ate.
- 138 *bən huneli.*  
They returned back (home).
- 139 *ipama si: bæ i te: sangə n diegə dəkə kyou læ.*  
*ipama* said: "They say that each horse has its own way!"
- 140 *bə pyepyasə kyei.*  
They took different directions.
- 141 *bən tyahənha.*  
They approached the village.
- 142 *də bæ nwose bega sangə nindene sani.*  
The *bega*'s horse arrived first.
- 143 *kwani si: sanəla ma.*  
The leper said: "This (is) the moment of your defeat!"
- 144 *bə pwondə tubi.*  
He threw the spear.

- 145 *bə kore laywoi də dyabərə bə dei.*  
It hit *laywoi*, who was pushed backwards and fell (to the ground).
- 146 *ipama kyere bə tɔ: n də ipama u.*  
*ipama* dismounted (and) said: "I am *ipama*!"
- 147 *bega wondə ha bən nwa u bigə bei.*  
The *bega* watched and recognised the child on the ground.
- 148 *u si: kwani ndyendə.*  
He said: "The leper has deceived me.
- 149 *n wo m biga!*  
I have killed my own child."
- 150 *a mum nyaməm magerə.*  
He said: "This is truly something!
- 151 *a di tibəla?*  
Have you eaten *tibu*?"
- 152 *ipama si: m wei pə di ningə.*  
*ipama* said: "My father, I have not eaten anything."
- 153 *u si: də tibə i nwa samama di pə nwama.*  
(The *bega*) said: "Without *tibu* the situation would not be like this!"
- 154 *ipama si: m pwamfi numə nwansu, n dise tibu.*  
*ipama* said: "I cannot argue any longer: I have eaten *tibu*."
- 155 *bega si: a manse ndilebu!*  
The *bega* said: "Make me eat from it!"
- 156 *ipama si: nɛ fi nyampə tywa sai də kyari sa i mpore.*  
*ipama* said: "I have got all the roots (i.e. ingredients) and there is (just) one that is missing."
- 157 *bega si: tywa maha tɛ m porə ha?*  
The *bega* said: "Which one is missing?"
- 158 *ipama si: n dyega bo a dya. kwani ywoi tari.*  
*ipama* said: "I have two stones for the fireplace.

- 159 *kwani ywoi tari.*  
A leper's head must be the third."
- 160 *bega si: a bai ywone nyamem da de kwani sage bo nyaha!*  
The *bega* said: "This is what you say, and there is the leper (living) here (in my house)!"
- 161 *kwani mbo nyahe a sage twagesu.*  
The leper of whom you speak is here.
- 162 *kwani sa ha: nya kwana twa m bolə.*  
The leper said: "I know other lepers who live here!"
- 163 *bega si: m we pwam katə a we.*  
The *bega* said: "I cannot leave you out!"
- 164 *kwani sa ha: yin yasi n tugə n, ywoi.*  
The leper said: "Allow me to place my head there (while I am still alive, instead of beheading me)."
- 165 *ipama si: de le tugə de ywoi de daam tige de le fwasə dei mwehu swanəla.*  
*ipama* said: "If he puts his head (there) and the potion boils and he removes (his head), the potion will spoil."
- 166 *kwani si: de pwam fwası.*  
The leper said: "I will not remove (my head)."
- 167 *bəm ba kogə sani daam n tigi kwani fwası de ywoi.*  
After (*ipama*) had lit the fire, the time (passed), the potion boiled, the leper wanted to remove his head.
- 168 *ipama si: to! n yi kyegəsə.*  
*ipama* said: "Tó!, I have foreseen it."
- 169 *bega mwehi kwani bə kyatə.*  
The *bega* stabbed the leper to death.
- 170 *n de mwanəm bə si: ywagəsə ningə kwierə kə pə fihu.*  
This is why it is said: You cannot deprive a poor man of his possessions.
- 171 *ba a n nwam bega a pwafi fihərə ywagəsau.*  
Even if you are a *bega*, you must not deprive a poor man.



172 *bə yegə dwonsə bə tē:*

And I (the narrator) add and say:

173 *kyanfutigə də kə hopwoi.*

[1] *The one who pushes against the baobab will get the bones* (proverb).

174 *kugə tēm pugərə kə twom n yegə kə fwagərə.*

[2] *The chicken that scratches the sand, turns it round and round*  
(proverb)

## Appendix 2: Tale 2 [The dog and the hyena]

Storyteller: Tagali Yantekwa (65†)

Date: Kotari, 18 January 1992

- 1 *hirə kwogə tə, mansə bwamma ninga di tyegə hyamənə, búgə m*  
*sində sində bə nində nwamə kwalu yimə u tibu u nwosi.*
- 2 *bə: a pahə bari?*
- 3 *kwalu si: a pwa mində su bə hyambi.*
- 4 *búgə nwoşə, kwalu yimə bə wasə bə tə: hwamfwannarə ningə*  
*lama wonara, ningə lama.*
- 5 *a kwa anə yei tahi sai bə nwa nindigəhu bou lə.*
- 6 *də bou tihe a la alə hyambi [...] də bou hyahe la alə hyambi.*
- 7 *búgə si: n du.*
- 8 *kwalu yimə timə bə wosə.*
- 9 *bə mani magə bugə bə fyatə tibu hyamu.*
- 10 *bə tə: búgə, ma mwanə tibələ.*
- 11 *a pwa porə də hyini.*
- 12 *də a sa hui a kalə a yiebə sa sai bə wagəni he bega hyahe [...]*
- 13 *bega sə kali bə manə n yahe mi palə tibu.*
- 14 *i bei búgə i bigə dəi tən yei tahi sa i pwa porə ningə.*
- 15 *búgə hui bə tei magə begau bə kyagi.*
- 16 *bega magə kankani bə pwomə.*
- 17 *búsi wági sə sai.*
- 18 *bega si: mi wusu ama mpə tə nime nwa.*
- 19 *i dyakə twolə nda tesu hwanhwam hyahe bə nyambi ni tibu himu*  
*bə u paləni tibə himu.*
- 20 *karam tibu a nə sində bə porə ningə kə kwa.*
- 21 *búsi si: you! tə bə palə tə n hya bə yagə tei hyambi bəi ningə bə*  
*yegə ya.*
- 22 *bə nwabupə kyangə də kə kwyem magəri.*
- 23 *kə pane.*
- 24 *bə nində bə tə: m wei, n kyese kankanə lə bwoi sagə pwei.*
- 25 *bega si: you! u kalu u hirebə.*
- 26 *lə bə nagə bə tei namenu yahə bə di tibu.*
- 27 *u sən tei bə dimə u magerau b huni bə wagi u yebə busi bə bə*  
*teinu namenu yahe.*
- 28 *bu pə kyangə si: yuau! i si bi də i yaməm.*
- 29 *i bei yisə bə tei də hya yahe i tei u i kwahi bə i doulə dii.*
- 30 *dəi hyambə də búgə hun, ba kə kyagerə.*

- 31 *bega si: a mum hyaməm nsa pwamfi.*  
32 *hyaməm hynu pire u tiporəgə.*  
33 *bə yatə bə u mwanə.*  
34 *bə pire u tibu du porəkə bə yatə bə nagə bə u mwanə.*  
35 *kwalu si: douni!*  
36 *búgə si: m pə pa, m pə dori!*  
37 *kwalu si: də yekəntə?*  
38 *awei sagə syenə n tibu, bə kangə m mwanə.*  
39 *m nda hui hyaməm bə kyagə bega pwomə kankani hirəbə hyamə*  
*bə wági.*  
40 *pə kyan saləkə kə lə n swanəkə twagəsəm.*  
41 *bə tə də bə tei ai bə hwabi bə nui.*  
42 *kwalu si: douni,awe, sama ni a kyara m ma hwabi.*  
43 *douni!*  
44 *búgə si: m pə dori douni.*  
45 *m pə dori.*  
46 *búgə n nwonwonu bə pwondə u tiporəkə bə tə bwoti kə pwei*  
*hyame.*  
47 *kwalu si: nanabə!*  
48 *bə tə: m pasə yagə dən wei la wei!*  
49 *bə tei sandənu kyankyani bə byamə búgə tei bə dei bə magə kə*  
*nui bə fwatə.*  
50 *i hyahe lə bu nwanasəkə kə pwa sandə bisi pwompwomə.*  
51 *dəkəba nagə bə yelə kə buru kən tən sandə twamə n kyarəm*  
*twamə i dya.*

### Appendix 3: Tale 3 [The master of all proverbs]

Storyteller: Mme Sanwekwa Yantekwa

Date: Kotari, 2 February 1996

- 1     *hira n yisu bwosi betə hya lən tinu kwankyaməm sai.*
- 2     *u lə n kyagu sai, u m panyaa toyeni bə pə mwei hirau.*
- 3     *bə byelə naafə fə myeha magəri.*
- 4     *kə mye bə pə mwamə.*
- 5     *u si: də mu mwei twagəsəm u mwanə naafə fun hundi.*
- 6     *bə tei kari ndyeli bə tən pwom u kwankyame hira pə mandə.*
- 7     *u dyalə u naafə bən hundi, bə kyarə syela mbwasəha u pə*  
*hyambə hira nəmu soru.*
- 8     *u kyandə bani u pə hyambə hira nəm u soru u n yegənə bə nwa.*
- 9     *təpu bou u kyarə də nihansu mansə u dyam magəri.*
- 10    *u si nən yei təpu a hu bə hya, bə yei bənwa bigə n pisəkə kə*  
*kyarəkə.*
- 11    *u si: ywa bigə sagə pisə kə kyarəkə də hira kwa.*
- 12    *də nagə hya.*
- 13    *bigə si: supi bə tə hira bou.*
- 14    *u si: dəhira bou mpane nim n hya.*
- 15    *kə yisə bə pirə hwambəkə bə kyar kyag b n daku nim.*
- 16    *u si: bigə ma te am pa nim.*
- 17    *n hya a n daku nim bə yagama.*
- 18    *kə si: ha pwasa a pə hya tə yahe təpu nwankəm.*
- 19    *n hyou ndyenwe bə du yantwo yandə bə du u yem bə kwandə*  
*yahe.*
- 20    *dən pə pisə n hywou yantwo yem bə nində tihe n nywou yem də*  
*handə hyahe yem.*
- 21    *hywou yantwo yemnə.*
- 22    *u i huni sani m pa pwatə.*
- 23    *magərə a pweu sa bou tə?*
- 24    *m pwei n sən tesə n dam bə hundənə yagə bə yigi u pə tə kafala.*
- 25    *u yegəsə bə nagətə kafala!*
- 26    *u si: a hywou sa nwotə?*
- 27    *kə si: n hywou sən tesə dei yensəm.*
- 28    *bə hundənə də yagu sibəsə u dyetə u pət ketou hyanel*
- 29    *u yegəsə bə sagə i te ketou!*
- 30    *u si: magərə toyeni hyani m pə hyambə nən yegi.*
- 31    *a m fi lə mwei a naafə.*

- 32 *bigə kyigərə kə naafə bə hube.*  
33 *u si: fimə bən hundi kə pweu nindəni kə kyorə bə u kyagi.*  
34 *bə tə: a n hya u yegəne.*  
[...]

## Appendix 4: Children and proverb competence

The following example may give an idea of playful proverb use and the acquisition of proverb competence at a young age. It is drawn from an interview conducted on 6 May 1995 in Kotari. Eight boys aged between 5 and 14 years were asked whether they knew any *kwankyama*. The response was a cascade of sayings, presented here in the order as they occurred in the interview:

- 1     You cannot have a mill and still eat badly ground flour.
- 2     You cannot have cattle and still plough with your hands.
- 3     You cannot have a millet field and sleep next to it.
- 4     If you want to eat some sauce, you cannot ask yourself whether it is tasty.
- 5     It is the sauce you want to eat, and you ask yourself whether it is tasty?
- 6     The one who knows how to play the flute cannot ask his neighbour how to play it.
- 7     The sheep have been roasted and you ask to eat their skin.
- 8     You cannot have yams and eat *pangli* (unsavoury vegetable).
- 9     You cannot have meat and eat the sauce made from ochra.
- 10    You cannot have a horse and ask your neighbour how to mount it. You have to mount it yourself in order to see what happens.
- 11    You cannot have a bicycle and walk.

At close inspection, the impressive range of different sayings proves to be nothing but variations on the same theme namely “one cannot have something and act as if one wouldn’t have it.” (1-3, 7-9, 11) and “one cannot do something and pretend not to know how to do it.” (6, 10). Two types of variation can be discerned: the first is a variation of imagery, while the abstract principle remains the same (e.g. 1-3). It requires the comprehension of classes and their relationship to each other. As the examples illustrate, the imagery is drawn from the immediate environment including recent items such as bicycles. The second variation is a grammatical one. Take lines 4 and 5. While wording and sense are almost identical, the syntax has changed, the statement being transformed into a question. A final observation concerns the inspiration from and exploration of the expressive potential of a certain image. This aspect becomes most evident in

*kwankyamə* which directly follow one another. 4, 5 and 8, 9 are ready examples, all of them revolving around the complex of eating.

What the sequence thus documents is the first steps towards a proficient and creative use of metaphorical language. It shows how children playfully explore the potential for meaning in both template and imagery and make early attempts to coin novel sayings by drawing on the immediate surroundings for inspiration. Although 'safe play' in the sense that it is the imagery and not the template which is altered, such variation nonetheless requires certain skills which are indispensable for a competent proverb use (comprehension of the analogic mechanism, identification of suitable tropes, abstraction of classes).

## Appendix 5: Assembly 'Water management in Kotari'

Assembly: 'Groupement de puits'

Date: Kotari, 31 January 1996

### Participants:

Yarigo Sambieni, (YS), aged 53, *délégué/ chef de village* of Kotari  
Mberma Sambieni, (MS), aged 60, head of the *groupement de puits*  
N'Ouéni Tawema, (NT), aged 42, farmer  
Mberma Bernard, (MB), aged 30, farmer  
N'Ouéni Nékoua, (NN), aged 52, farmer  
N'Ouéni Dari, (ND), aged 37, farmer and shop-keeper  
Touboudyeni Nicholas, (TN), aged 27, farmer  
Bale Tamari, (BT), aged 21, farmer  
Kyetekwa Matthias, (KM), aged 28, farmer

YS:

- 1 *m bi twambə yapema dei nyem be wagəŋə.*
- 2 *də təi kyəsi tə twabə n yagəm.*
- 3 *tə dwopə mbaləm sambyem nə n sən twaku yapem bə tə kyagi bə*  
*tə: palə waki.*
- 4 *mu twambə magəri dəu n sən twangələm bə tə kyagi.*

MS:

- 5 *bənwanu delege m ba i twambə toyen kyembi.*
- 6 *papi.*
- 7 *toyen dyaki: bə la tē, tə hogə bə kwatə wambwaləhu.*
- 8 *toyen tari: hyani nwam toyen hyarə kai.*
- 9 *papi tahi tə la dyemə bə lə hansu yolə hyahe.*
- 10 *təi n si: bwigə tə hogə la bə yegə bə kə yisəkə.*
- 11 *kwagəhu kwa wegəhu lə.*
- 12 *tə la ya də lə lai hyahe.*
- 13 *twaməm nansyega, n si: də twaməm twei tə hyambə tə nə tēm bə*  
*yisəkə tə kwagəhu.*
- 14 *pei ahi a la də tə ham bə kyagesə tənəm pugəkəm pei hi i yei.*
- 15 *tə la dyem bə hamsu tē sə, yó, twaməm syegə də pefə sagə nam*  
*kwa.*
- 16 *ndyeu sai bou u hogə bə hyambi u nən tyagm tə kyendə pei a hi i*  
*wagəm.*
- 17 *də mangə tahi ala də tə rə yorə bə wasə.*



18 *toyeni nai tou li hyame.*  
19 *də ntou mansi tɛ dwondə twali.*

YS:

20 *hyani ntou toyeni.*  
21 *bən da tei waki ali hwari, tɛ kawekuhu kwalɛbigi kɛ la bou dɛ kɛ la*  
*tau.*  
22 *kɛ la la ta hya, nmamɛ bɛ yagɛ u tei bɛ hyambasɛ pwombi.*  
23 *bɛ nwamɛ dɛ ningɛ kyarɛkɛ swanəsɛ.*  
24 *u n dasanenu sakwom bigɛ hyanga.*  
25 *kwalɛbigɛ la nwahenu bɛ ya bɛtɛ: ningɛ swanɛkɛ.*  
26 *aka tɛi tyendɛ bɛ kɛ dwosi?*  
27 *u si: hui huisu.*  
28 *bɛ hyambɛ sakwombigɛ i mpane latwali bigɛ pugɛnɛ dɛ wisɛm bɛ*  
*mani bɛ loa.*  
29 *kwalɛbigɛ si: tɛ hin sa pa n hya kɛ pei!*  
30 *u ba manu ningɛ bɛtɛ kyagi kɛ pei nwamɛ.*  
31 *n dɛ nwamɛm dɛ tɛ pɛ hogɛ ama kɛ mani lai dɛ pefɛ kwa, ha!, ningɛ*  
*pahu yoyo, dɛ pefɛ kwa maha.*  
32 *i pɛ hyambɛ kulwonu n yelɛkɛnhu, bɛ n da mani bɛ palɛtahi hyanɛ?*  
33 *m mani bɛ yagɛ u kane hyanɛ bɛ kyendɛ fwampeɪ twali.*  
34 *u la mani bɛ tɛ hyamɛnɛ dɛ sani.*  
35 *tɛ kwandɛnu bɛ hyambɛ pefɛ bɛ kyigɛrɛ bɛ kyigɛrɛ kunkwagɛ.*  
36 *u mpan lai dapwogɛ hwarɛkɛ pwigɛm la dyaki.*

NT:

37 *to, magerɛ lɛ i yasɛ toyenɛ.*  
38 *kyamɛ si bɛ nui: dɛ sandɛnu bugɛ kyarɛ dɛkɛ nwolu da pɛ kɛ pumɛ*  
*holi bɛ pɛ kɛ mwom pitu, dɛ sandɛrɛ dɛ tei bɛ mwei bɛ nwamɛ*  
*buwurɛkɛ kɛi hwabɛ.*  
39 *bɛ huni a si:*  
40 *m bugɛ pɛ suli.*  
41 *kɛ mwolu bɛ hwabu.*  
42 *darɛ a him a pɛ kɛ pwam hosi.*  
43 *a tɛn hwabɛ a humbim bɛ kwandɛnu bɛ kɛ, pwondɛ hogɛ, a pa kɛ*  
*pwondɛ.*  
44 *bɛ mam bɛ yagɛ ai kɛ tɛ kɛ nwamɛ bugɛ.*  
45 *dɛ ka sa nwamɛ hira lɛ.*  
46 *mam bɛ yagɛ tɛn ham hanɛm amum ha, kwagɛrɛ kalɛ tuntwandau,*  
*tɛ syeli hyahi twamɛm amum.*  
47 *kwagɛrɛ kalɛ begau m wei n ywosu hya lɛ.*

48 *ba yendi?*  
 49 *təm bwama bən hanə kyaga aha, bə tei bə nində AVD.*  
 50 *to.*  
 51 *də kwandənu də begau bən dyahəsələ.*  
 52 *n we, n wondə bə nwa, bega sa wui syelə hyahə yiebə lə bə tə bən*  
*dyahəsə bə kyarəbə.*  
 53 *barə mwani bega wui syeli?*  
 54 *də syeli dyahə yagə kyarəma yagə dya, sinu də pafi bən dyahəsəkə*  
*hyame.*  
 55 *bega bou, ama də bega pə hya u hani.*  
 56 *syeli hya bə yagə lə tou begau.*  
 57 *u lə mpə hyau bə tə u nwanu begau.*  
 58 *ndyeli sai pahu də ningə pə simə ala, m wei nə ywosi bega lə.*  
 59 *a pə tə mwomə kyei.*  
 60 *də nwanu awe a budasi lə tə bei.*  
 61 *a n tə kwageru də tə mwolu, awei sapa tə pwondə hogə.*  
 62 *bə n him bə pa puli pirəhu daam hyahe bə tə mwana.*  
 63 *sanderə də n tei mwei nə mwohu hyahe nə n hwabə lə.*  
 64 *n huni, a yegətə : m bugə pə suli.*  
 65 *bə hwabu mwohu hyahe.*  
 66 *m pa kə pa kyoù!*  
 67 *də bwonu awe mba sandənu.*  
 68 *a busi n toyeni mingə tahi hyame.*

YS:

69 *u n yalali hyani n hinsa pə hya u nagə təm.*

ND:

70 *ha ha, a nampə tou toyeni pə ya.*

71 *a magə hyanə la?*

NT:

72 *nam magə hyalə.*

ND:

73 *wərə ntou toyeni?*

MB:

74 *bə nwanu tə ba twagesu pwombi a li toyeni tən twagesəm tə sai; ba*  
*ndyeli sai bai twagesi tə bai twagesi nim amum toyeni lə.*

- 75 *ama m wei tən danwase tahi, dəm ba ya nən ya hyanə lə bə hya betə*  
*tə la mwanəsə tə nage paləkəm.*
- 76 *bə nwa twaməm ndyeli sai də sə yiai, tə nampə hya tə nən təm.*
- 77 *də tēi ham ama bə nage wusi wakə kyeti lə bə hyambə tə nən təm.*  
 [unclear recording]
- 78 *nda you latwali də bə yagə delege pwomə kankani bə yagə bwisi də*  
*bə ha wasənə bwisi, twaməm lahini hini.*
- 79 *bə tə bə manu saba bə tein.*
- 80 *n sə pə hya də bə la tense.*
- 81 *u pa kyagə u hinwa hyani hira lə nəm u kam wa.*
- 82 *m wei nage hyambi də tēi wakə kyeti lə.*
- 83 *syeli sə sai mani tə kyagi tə nən wagekəm tə bwigə pei.*
- 84 *tēi hyambi, m wei nə nan u ni hyame.*

NS:

- 85 *də nwanu twaməm kyaga hyamə i bou bə sai tə bai wasə n kyarənə.*
- 86 *werə nə hui u nə kwatə kyagi kyagəm?*
- 87 *to!*
- 88 *bə kwa bə pə mwamə hirəbə nasi.*
- 89 *tə bai wasəm kyarənə.*
- 90 *mbwamu i hui bən kyagu u yahe yiebə, nikola hui bən kyagu*  
*nambwam, bə kyeu n kyagu, dukuri kyundu n kagu.*
- 91 *bə you wondə bə tə ama n hogən!*
- 92 *hyani sai pə tou wagəm.*

MB:

- 93 *hyani n nani yasū də two sagə nampə ya.*
- 94 *hyanə mahe də kwa toyeni hini.*
- 95 *bə mam bə yagə barə?*
- 96 *ndyeu sai u m ba i n kyagələ bə kwandənu kankani pwomə kankani*  
*pwomənə kyogə m bətə pwaha la, da la, bigə la yenī i wagə bə kyesi*  
*toyeni mboli.*
- 97 *hyani ba u nage n, kwa ala də tə ba kwandəhu nwase.*

NN:

- 98 *dən dyen kangə tə pan you tə sai tə twa pan ya, ningə də tə m byelə*  
*də lə mangəm.*
- 99 *də kwandənkəm, də tə byelə samə si dere də two mani bə tə:*
- 100 *m pə pa n kwa mahe.*
- 101 *nīm tə sai.*

- 102 *tə pan hyambi də u i yo tə sai tə pa kyesi də kwandenu tə byelə  
ningə n dyegə.*
- 103 *də pefə la, tə pa n hya təi hya bən twagəsə tə hywo dyebə bə palə  
nim syeli hyahe.*
- ND:
- 104 *n wei nə nage yatahi i n kyagə sə sai ama...byeləm hyaməm.  
pə nwanu.*
- 105 *n wei n sai tə fwarə kwatə kau lə, i magerəbə i hya fwarə kwatə kau  
tou nikwaku lə.*
- 106 *də hyaməm pə nua tə pafi bə kyagi batə tala pə byelə pei.*
- 107 *tə la kyagəsə tə si: pwaha la, da la tə kwandenu bə yegə wagi kosi  
num num bə fugə tə bwigə.*
- 108 *bwigə nwanu pwaha lə də a tou pwahau bə pəu yilu u pa wasə ba  
bwasəki.*
- 109 *də sani tala wage nwasisə hyani.*
- 110 *bə sage yegə m bou nwa yandama.*
- 111 *to!*
- 112 *m wei, n sə pə hya.*
- 113 *tə la hya bə yagə hirəbə də lə nwankəm.*
- 114 *ama m wei m magerau m pa ywosi hira, bə sai ya toyena an wosi,  
mageri sulu!*
- 115 *tə la yasə tə si: də lə nwankəm bwigə disəka tibə bə kwandenu bə yei  
də bə tən tei hira yahe bu kam.*
- 116 *i si: twaməm bou.*
- 117 *tei hira yahe du hunə kuhu bə nwanu sanama n nwankə ama.*
- 118 *də pefə lə də a u kamə də u tə u kwa hyani a i kyəsi.*
- 119 *hyani hirəbə sə sai la bou lə.*
- 120 *two bou da pu kam nwa u pa nage bə yelə pefə kə ama bə mwane  
hirau.*
- 121 *two bou da pu kam nwa u pa nage bə yelə pefə kə ama bə mwane  
hirau.*
- 122 *n dyelu tə u patə tə byelə bwigə lə.*
- 123 *bə hya bə tə da pugə hirau du bwamə da pu wonsu bə sau ham dəu  
a sahərə kyou, sam a n hya bə tə: a nage wuole*
- 124 *də u hyamə u kyigerəse.*
- 125 *a i yensi a nən tən bəu tenu bwogətwoli twontwom.*
- 126 *u bangi bə hunə ba sahe a kyou..*
- 127 *nə i nage yagə n də hyame.*

MB:

- 128 *darə mansə i ya hyame m pə twaməm na!*  
129 *kankani pə pwom də kankani pə pwom bə digi syeli hyahe hira pafi.*  
130 *to!*  
131 *bə tei hira yahe kama də tə la palə wakə kunkwangə lə.*

ND:

- 132 *n sage yegə bə ya tawemwe yasə toyeni.*  
133 *twahi bə lou mam bə yagə.*  
134 *m pa ywosə begau n sage pa yasi hira hina.*  
135 *AVD də begau i sai i nwanələ.*  
136 *toyen manəti?*  
137 *i pə wagə bə ham bəta təi n wagə bə dyesələ.*  
138 *i magərəbə də i wondə bə nwa i nwam syeli sai i kyagi lə, də hira mansə sage bou i disu hyahe bə lə wonsu syelə hyahe.*  
139 *hirebə sai i kwandenu bə wagə hui kyari.*  
140 *u hyambə bə nwa i twahe pwene.*  
141 *da tou busi də sə pwei, bə tə na pwatə a sai wua himə lə bə sə twanga.*  
142 *sə ba i mpwepwe lə bə hya bə yagə sə ba hundənə a yahe.*  
143 *di hyambə i n tə nagə dəu nwankəm də pə nwankən hyame i kwandenu bə u wusi i kyesi i twabə.*  
144 *bə u kyagi bə tə: tə i nagə an tə tinkama lə.*  
145 *də a tə tinkama tə mansə i hya bə ya ama lə ningə a kama.*  
146 *tə tən dyahəsə tə bansəm tə pə nwam syeli kyame*  
147 *syeli kwyə bansəm nə tən kwandenu bə yatahi.*  
148 *tə pafi bə nwosə bə ya hyani.*  
149 *i nwankə ama pafi ba di tei bə wusə hirau yabwotu bə tə u kangə twaməm.*  
150 *bə bai wusi begələ bə fi bə kyesi də ywoli.*  
151 *u nən tei sani bə tə n wei mpə hya bə nkyagi a li də sani bə wusi syeli hyahe yosəbelə.*  
152 *bə man bə yagə sabi sage nankwa bə figu i kyagi bwosi ywoi.*  
153 *də toyeni lə i kwandenu bə byelə yibu bə kyagi i twabə.*  
154 *də lə sa pə yei hyaməm i fi bə tə:*  
155 *tə kwatə nə hira a kwei!*  
156 *i fi bə wusi waki kyeti bəta: tə kwatəne hira kwei u twaməm!*  
157 *hyaməm syeli i n hya hira kwei u lə m pə nagə u bə tə timə.*

MS:

- 158 *i nan twagəsə alɪ nampə yei.*  
159 *tou toyeni bə tagərə begau.*

ND:

- 160 *m pə nwanse n si: a pə u byegu!*  
161 *amu byegəm hyamə n ha?*  
162 *da u byegə toyena bə nində a num dəu pə yegə toyeni ba lə kyari a*  
*fisə bə wusi u kwonseɪ.*  
163 *bə wagənu a i mandətu?*  
164 *i mpiri a kyagi bə tə: hwanhwanwe akwe u nwam kwyei.*  
165 *lə də nwanu kwyeu.*  
166 *m u mwanə toyena a ha lə u pə a dyahe.*  
167 *i tə bare?*  
168 *də nwanu i magerəbə i ba dyahəsə bə kam nə.*

NT:

- 169 *də sanɪ mansə sɔgə bwipesi yese.*  
170 *bə sɔgə mwanə bə tə: nwokyankundə yam pə tuei dəbə sabi nampə*  
*mane.*  
171 *m mam yagə matei n da tweili n da hundənə bə pugə sabi lə, bə*  
*hunə bə mwanə sambyenwa.*  
172 *də la kwandənu bə tei kutali lai.*  
173 *nanəma sanfye wəsə lə yagə.*  
174 *bwisi nsa pə nində ama də ningə nampə pale.*  
175 *tə kwandənu bə dyahəsə bə mwanəsə kumandau sabi bə kari bwiga.*  
176 *də him nampə pale.*  
177 *də syela twa sa wasəma də tə nampə pala ma a la.*  
178 *bə la tə dən yandu u mwanə.*  
179 *tə i tyendi two bou bəi yagerə bə tə ha bə la kam bwisi.*  
180 *tə pə kamə u ywose tə bei nwa.*  
181 *i n hya tēm ba nwanke ama tə sai tə pə dyahəsə.*  
182 *də pə kwandənu yagə i sam.*  
183 *də bwipegə a ka kə sabi pə hui.*  
184 *tə bei sa ham bə twomə tə twabə.*  
185 *tə n ham ama hirəbə bou a la bə hya də nəm wasə.*  
186 *lai də i nage i kamə i pa dagi tə bei ham tuntantuna lə tə pə hya də i*  
*sam.*  
[...]  
187 *n də maməm tə m wei yampwom məntou hya n tahi lə.*  
188 *hirəbə kamə bə tei bə wase.*

189 *bwisi n sa pə nində ama.*  
190 *dəi sani ti tyendə?*  
191 *i pə hya toyen kyeti mbeli hyan tahi?*  
192 *n wase.*

YS: (addresses NT)

193 *m mam bə yagə dəi bwisi am ba ywonu sə toyeni ali, ala bou hyani.*  
194 *a n da bwom hyame awei magerau a hunəm a tə barə?*  
195 *a him, eh, eh, ba wagə bə n dyahəsənə!*  
196 *sinə yapəm, eh, bə tə bən da tə kyagə toyeni ali tēi kotə kyo mahu i*  
*tə?*  
197 *awei san ywosəkən tə də tə bei hin wagə bə dyahəsə lə?*  
198 *sanama a sinə bə n hyambəsu.*  
199 *tə bei sa dyahəsə kən tə?*  
200 *tə sagə tə nə tei bə nyambənə toyeni bə huni də kwandenu tə ham*  
*nə bə hyambi tə nagə korə kyou ndyehu.*  
201 *wendu, eh, a hinə ama a pə mane n də ama.*  
202 *mpwom kankani m pə hyambə hirəbə.*  
203 *bə si: dəi wagə yapəm n.*  
204 *a magerau a lən da tə u dəi wagə yapəm.*  
205 *n yisə bə tei syengu bə lou n da hyau....*

ND:

206 *da kyagə a kyagi a yangəsi...!*

YS:

207 *nən kyagi.*  
208 *a sagətə a n ywosu, a ywosu.*  
209 *nan t nə pə dyahəkəntə?*  
210 *m pə dyahəsə manəti?*  
211 *də twaməm n dyeməm a kyagəsə bə tə amum da mum.*  
212 *a pə dyahe amum, a pə dyahe amum.*  
213 *katagə m magerau, tə ba pə yisə bə nwosə tə ama!*  
214 *nwa ke hyahe, n si: bə ba tou begə turau.*  
215 *bə tə: nagə yurə bə di lə.*  
216 *lə nanti tə di: bare mahe?*

NT:

217 *da kyagə mage a si a mage n we.*

YS:

218 *n ywonu a n tøndə a n ywose.*

219 *n si: a pə n ywosi!*

NT:

220 *m we ha nə, yamə n də yau.*

221 *a tə a ntə ma ywose.*

222 *n kwandənu.*

223 *a ywonu waki tə la wage bou ha a la n twonə la?*

224 *a n you!*

225 *a hwankə ama a twontwonda bə a we*

226 *də a antwonə nə tei bə hyamə ní, nə ma kyagi bə tə:*

227 *n tə nə hyambəni.*

228 *dyahe amuma læ.*

229 *nə m ma kyagəm hyamə n hui læ fwa.*

230 *bə n sani bə ai pwom kankani la, ai ya a nuyam la, də bwonu a wei.*

231 *m pa kyagi twaməm. yem bə yegə yei bən dyahəsü.*

232 *m we hya n tou kwyəu.*

233 *n kyagə hyanələ n sə:*

234 *amwanke ama tə bega le a læ m pə dyahəsü.*

235 *a magəreau a hya a nwanke ama n dyeli sai pahu də a pə dyahe.*

236 *m wei m ba i a kyagə:*

237 *n si: a pə dyahe!*

238 *a si: tə la wage bou waki.*

239 *bə ala pwomə kankani ha syengu lai ha, bə paa waki ha bə tə:*

240 *tə wage ha di toyeni hyahe ha.*

241 *mani, n da tə barə?*

242 *n sə bə pwomə yia hira pə yei n si yapəm.*

243 *twabə pa syengu.*

244 *bə hunə awe ba yasi.*

245 *bə tei syengu dən wei la wei we la kwandənu bə huni bə yasi two tə?*

246 *dən wei la wei tə dyema werə n kwandənu bə huni bə yasi twotə?*

247 *n sa la pə hunə ama da la mwanəsə toyeni bə tə:*

248 *sou, nə pa ama kari m pə huntənə i dyahəsə n twaməm.*

249 *təm bwole ala tə kyoa hirəbə bə nwa alə m pə hunu ha a yagə tēla i  
kwatə palən na?*

250 *tə bei yi bə tagərə a kwyə hyahe fwa a.*

251 *kye hya kwyə læ.*

252 *m a kyagi n si: a i fi m bou də bə pa hahi də hira læ.*

253 *m pə a halu, də hirəbə a halu pwompwom.*

254 *m a twagəsənu ama tə bei tə a halu.*



- 255 *bə hya tə kwey den ba twagəsənu.*  
 256 *a sa n yasū hira kyara nə yali!*  
 257 *m a kyagə tə twaməm mahe n kwandənu bə dyahəməm.*

TN:

- 258 *i magerəbə i hya də a pinu pə bansi də a nundə bwampehu hui*  
*porələ.*  
 259 *swanswama pwahau sage nwa də a pwaha nwa.*  
 260 *də a u pwomə u ba i yesi lə bə pa yese u dau.*  
 261 *bwigə magerə kə tou bilu.*  
 262 *i bei də bega hya i sande.*  
 263 *bə mam bə yagə u m pə tyahərə ama toyeni.*  
 264 *du tə u tyahə də pə a di.*  
 265 *nə mwama du manə bə ya n nagə n hanə bə kyahe.*  
 266 *u kahe bə yei an ha bə ham, bə kyahe.*  
 267 *i hya, n dyeli mwani də twam kyagə sa lən disəha?*  
 268 *m bou sai u pə hya u fvonu.*  
 269 *də sani a pa mani bən twagəsənu tə sai tahi.*  
 270 *ma mansə.*  
 271 *tənda tyemə bwigə tou kə n kwandənu bən dusəkən.*  
 272 *ha, də tyahəsə?*  
 273 *i n hyanəla tə hya ni hweru.*  
 274 *də a sanhu pə pwei sansu mansə pə wasəku..*

ND:

- 275 *m we nə nagə yali toyeni də sai:*  
 276 *damə mba tən swanə mbutə lai lə.*  
 277 *ba la samə daam den woke m butə lai mbai te bə wasə wogələ.*  
 278 *swanswama tə ham ama də lə nwanu tə nagə bweilə.*  
 279 *bə yasil*  
 280 *tən ham ama bə pə bwosu nwa.*  
 281 *də tə nagə bweilə, tēi hyambə pyetə kabə də bə wosi magari.*  
 282 *hee, hiraū ama!*  
 283 *m pə tə sambyemə u dyahəsə nwa.*  
 284 *u pə dyahəsū.*  
 285 *bə bə nwanu i ndə yagəm mageri hyahe də bə tə i hei ninsi m paləsi*  
*du hei i mba i nwam u lə n dyahəsū.*  
 286 *bə ma i mba dyahəsū hyame u lə.*  
 287 *dan ya bə tə u palə ningə ndyegə du pə pale, a tou kyou bəi wusi*  
*waki bə u mu yensu.*  
 288 *a i fi bə tə i nagə a pwonsə kankani.*

- 289 *də hyaməm nwa, a i fi bə dyem bə tə: a li lai n da te a palə aka, a  
palə ka, a pə pale.*
- 290 *bə nwanu a nwama a pirə bə nwanu u n yagəm.*
- 291 *i nwansi ndyeu sai bou u i fi bə tə: n tə pə naru.*
- 292 *sabi n sa kwa hyame i səsai i ba i kyagi.*
- 293 *hirəkwogə fei lə barə?*
- 294 *də mba pə dese tahi.*
- 295 *ambobo bə nwa tei dyahəsənu ywoi.*
- 296 *ba yendə?*
- 297 *sambyenwe u magerə mandə bətə i bansi la.*
- 298 *u hya bə tə i myelə bə dyahəsə.*
- 299 *n də mwanəm ba i pahu ndylei u бага kwa i mahe.*
- 300 *u hya bə yagə aba bə myele.*
- 301 *ningə twagə təm bou dəi kwandənu bə ham u kə pale.*
- 302 *u n tə hyambə sani i m pu haməm hyame bə tə i dyahe ninsi twasi i  
myele.*
- 303 *i myem hyame n də mwanəm du mangə sai mi wum.*
- 304 *m we, nə i nagə dwonsi hyamə.*

MB:

- 305 *hee, də tei ham ala yapem ama bə nagə kyagi tə twabə tə n  
nwankəm də m wei n huilə.*

- 306 *m wei tə wusu pwombi də kyou də yahəsəm*
- 307 *i n dyem bə lou yahəsəm bə yasi toyen ywoa.*

ND:

- 308 *təm ba dou ama tə ba wasələ.*
- 309 *a yagə n sagə yegə kwara.*
- 310 *də tə kyesə tə twabə hyaməm sa pə yegənə.*

MB:

- 311 *tol*
- 312 *swanswama ha ama lə la dyem bə nwasə n ywonu pwombi hau.*
- 313 *tə la dyem bə nwasəsə toyenə sai.*
- 314 *tə sa bei, la nwa bə nwanu nə yagəm twaməm nə karəkəməm.*
- 315 *kankani nəm pwoni.*
- 316 *hira pa fi bə yisəkə ama pə yensu.*
- 317 *n ywonu bəi tei bə twagəsə hirəbə sai kyesə.*
- 318 *tol*
- 319 *də tə n tou lai tənən yeli tə tutə kyaga.*

ND:

320 *hu, hu, kankani nəm pwom nil*

MB:

321 *kankani pwomə tə tutə kyaga də lai bə tə yiai.*

322 *n dyeu m bou ala bə pə dyem sabi də hya kwa.*

323 *bə digi i pwa fwagərə bəm piri di pem.*

324 *ba nwa bə kyagi ndyeu sinə hau də nwama.*

325 *m mam bə yagə hyani nanə n kwari pwombi hau.*

ND:

326 *də tyagə hyamə ha kankani sa pə pwomə ama dəi pwomə manətə?*

327 *kutali tali n yinə m pwoni kankani bəi kyagi?*

MB:

328 *to!*

329 *ywonu hyaməm n hya twaməm nən karəkəm, m pə hya.*

ND:

330 *tə bei kyagə hyaməm twaməm bou i tahi bwigə bilu də bega bilu.*

NT:

331 *n wei, ala ma də pə nwanu waki n nagi bən tumə ywonwa.*

332 *mam bə yagə yapem ama.*

333 *tən pirə ama, tən də hyomə bətei tu tahi ala.*

334 *i tən yole bə dwosi də lə pə swane də pa dwosi.*

335 *də lə pə swane də pa dwosi*

336 *mam bə yagə n wei n yiei sanwa mboli, tə begau, tə bwigə də syeli  
hyahe mba dyahəsəbə bə nwamə syeli nambim.*

337 *yagə tə hundi bə hya kankani nəm pwomə lai.*

338 *bə sage n hya də kankani pwom bə twei tənən yei lai.*

339 *pwaha la da da la kosi num num.*

340 *bə kyigərə dəi tei nəm i pwomwa, i yasi bə hundənə.*

341 *bə hyambi i nən təm syeli sai hyahe.*

342 *tə ba kwandenu kankani pwom lai bə hyambi pei kyigərə lai.*

NN:

343 *nwe nə sa nage kani da i patə kosi num, pwaha patə kosi num?*

NT:

344 *sai n kyareṃ.*

345 *nə wuri im ba i patəkəṃ.*

NN:

346 *təpu kosi num num.*

NT:

347 *kei! dəi bou i kyahe i pwigə i patə kosi num num.*

348 *hirau dəu ywoli pei lə.*

ND:

349 *hyani wasə.*

350 *dwonde i toyeni dyaki.*

351 *i sa hampə byalə lai!*

MS:

352 *sihi matei, yanlai sinu də twali samədi a tarəsu ama.*

353 *ti tərə mani?*

NT:

354 *i pwom kankani sinu.*

355 *də kankani pwom simu, samədi lai barə boli?*

MB:

356 *də tə nəm pwongə, də kwandənu tə pwom də kari bou lakahe.*

357 *də tə pwom tə pə pwom yagelai sinu nwa, ndyeu la, du tou kwosəm  
da samədi lai u syegərə.*

358 *dəu i tei bə kwosi syengu la u tei, dəu nən kwosi tahi yol*

359 *u kwosi kutali lai saga nsibəhu tə tutə bə yei.*

NT:

360 *kutali mpane lai?*

MB:

361 *pefə toyeni.*

362 *də kari pə suhe mahe də yei?*

NT:

363 *bangi hu nim tən husu bə ti le.*

ND:

364 *də kankani ti pwatətu ba tən tile.*

MS:

365 *də pwom bæ kyagi waki lailə.*

NT:

366 *waki sa kwa.*

367 *dəi pwom bæ kyagi pei kyigərə lai lə.*

MB:

368 *m bou bæ pə yia.*

369 *bə pə kwandənu bən yagə kyen ne bæ tə səhyinkwa mahe.*

370 *sə i n kwye nə.*

ND:

371 *magerə dwondə i toyen dyaki.*

[...]

## Bibliography

- Aaron, Robert I. (1985) 'Epistemology', in *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* (Macropædia, 15th edition), pp. 601-24. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica.
- Abrahams, Roger D. (1972) 'Personal power and social restraint in the definition of folklore', in Américo, Paredes and Richard Bauman (eds.) *Towards New Perspectives in Folklore*, pp. 16-30. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila (1986) *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Adagba, E. C. (1986/87) 'Recherche archæologique en république populaire du Bénin'. *Cahiers des Archives du Sol (Publication de l'Equipe de Recherche de l'Université Nationale du Bénin)* 1(1): 124-53.
- Agalic, James (1978) 'Story-Telling among the Balsa of Northern Ghana', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 103(1): 261-78.
- Albert, Ethel M. (1964) "'Rhetoric," logic," and "poetics" in Burundi: culture patterning of speech behavior', in Gumperz, John J. and Dell Hymes (eds.) *The Ethnography of Communication*, Special Issue, *American Anthropologist* 66(6), pt. 2: 75-102.
- Arewa, Ojo E. (1970) 'Proverb usage in a "natural context" and oral literary criticism', *Journal of American Folklore* 83: 430-37.
- Arewa, Ojo E. and Alan Dundes (1964) 'Proverbs and the ethnography of speaking folklore', in Gumperz John J. and Dell H. Hymes (eds.). *The Ethnography of Communication*, Special Issue, *American Anthropologist* 66(6), pt. 2: 70- 85.
- Aristotle (1991) *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, newly translated by George A. Kennedy. New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Azuonye, Chukwuma (1990) 'The performances of Kaalu Igirigiri, an Ohafia Igbo singer of tales', *Research in African Literatures* 21(3): 17-50.
- Bailey, F. G. (1981) 'Dimensions of rhetoric in conditions of uncertainty', in Paine, Robert (ed.) *Politically Speaking: Cross-Cultural Studies of Rhetoric*, pp. 25-38. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Balle, Thomas (1988) *Contribution à l'histoire précoloniale des Berba de l'Atakora*. (Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université Nationale du Bénin, unpublished).
- Barber, Karin (1991) *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow. Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press and

- Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press for the International African Institute.
- Barber, Karin and P. F. de Moraes (eds.) *Discourse and its Disguises. The Interpretation of Oral Texts*. Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, Birmingham University African Studies Series 1.
- Barthes, Roland (1987) *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bauman, Richard (1975) 'Verbal art as performance', *American Anthropologist* 77: 290-311.
- Bauman, Richard (1986) *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauman, Richard and Joel Sherzer (1989) [1974] *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (2nd edition). London: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauman, Richard and Charles L. Briggs (1990) 'Poetics and performance as critical perspectives on language and social life', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 59-88.
- Ben-Amos, Dan (1971) 'Toward a definition of folklore in context', *Journal of American Folklore* 84: 3-15.
- Ben-Amos, Dan (1975a) 'Two Benin Storytellers', in Dorson, R. *African Folklore*, pp. 103-14. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ben-Amos, Dan (1975b) *Sweet Words: Storytelling Events in Benin*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Studies of Human Issues.
- Ben-Amos, Dan and Kenneth S. Goldstein (eds.) (1975) *Folklore: Performance and Communication*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Ben-Amos, Dan (ed.) (1976) *Folklore Genres*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bernstein, B. (1964) 'Elaborated and restricted codes: their social origins and some consequences', in Gumperz, John J. and Dell Hymes (eds.) *The Ethnography of Communication*, Special Issue, *American Anthropologist* 66(6), pt. 2: 55-69.
- Bloch, Maurice (ed.) (1975) *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*. London: Academic Press.
- Boadi, Lawrence (1972) 'The language of the proverb in Akan', in Dorson, Richard *African Folklore*, pp. 183-91. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books.

- Bohannon, Paul (1954) *Tiv Farm and Settlement*. London: H.M. Stationary Office.
- Brenneis, Donald Lawrence (1984) 'Straight talk and sweet talk: political discourse in an occasionally egalitarian community', in Brenneis, Donald Lawrence and Fred R. Myers (eds.) *Dangerous Politics: Language and Politics in the Pacific*, pp. 69-84. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Brenneis, Donald Lawrence (1988) 'Language and disputing', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 17: 221-37.
- Brenneis, Donald Lawrence and Fred R. Myers (eds.) (1984) *Dangerous Politics: Language and Politics in the Pacific*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Briggs, Charles L. (1988) *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Briggs, Charles L. (1993) 'Personal sentiments and polyphonic voices in Warao women's ritual wailing: music and poetics in a critical and collective discourse', *American Anthropologist* 95: 929-58.
- Burke, Kenneth (1957) *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Burke, Kenneth (1969) *A Rhetoric of Motives* (2nd edition). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cancel, Robert (1989) *Allegorical Speculation in an Oral Society: The Tabwa Narrative Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chimombo, Steve (1988) *Malawian Oral Literature: The Aesthetics of Indigenous Arts*. Zomba: Centre for Social Research and Department of English, University of Malawi, sponsored by Harold Macmillan Trust, London.
- Christensen, J. B. (1958) 'The role of proverbs in Fante culture', *Africa* 28(3): 232-43.
- Cole, Herbert M. (1982) *Mbari: Art and Life Among the Owerri Igbo*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Comaroff, John (1975) 'Talking politics: oratory and authority in a Tswana chiefdom', in Bloch, Maurice (ed.) *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, pp. 141-63. London: Academic Press.



- Conklin, H. (1964) 'Ethnogenealogical method', in Goodenough, W. (ed.) *Explorations in Cultural Anthropology*, pp. 22-55. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Cornevin, Robert (1981) *La République Populaire du Bénin. Des origines dahoméennes à nos jours*. Paris: Editions G.-P. Maisonneuve & Larose.
- Cosentino, Donald J. (1982) *Defiant Maids and Stubborn Farmers. Tradition and Invention in Narrative Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coyssi, Anatole (1946) 'Tiansi et Combetto. Petits sauvages et grands cœurs', *Grands Lacs* (Revue générale des missions d'Afrique) 11: 137-39.
- Czekelius, Annette R. (1993a) *Orature and Rhetoric Among the Berba of Northern Benin*, unpublished MA-dissertation. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Czekelius, Annette R. (1993b) 'Of meaning and significance: the emic interpretation of a West African tale', *African Languages and Cultures* 6(2): 121-34.
- Dittmer, Karl (1979) 'Die Obervolta-Provinz', in Baumann, Hermann (ed.) *Die Völker Afrikas und ihre traditionellen Kulturen*, pp. 495-537. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Dorson, Richard (ed.) (1972) *African Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Dundes, Alan (1964) 'Texture, text and context', *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 28: 251-65.
- Duranti, Alessandro and Donald Lawrence Brenneis (eds.) (1986) *The Audience as Co-Author*, Special Issue, *Text* 6(3): 239-347.
- Eastman, Carol M. (1984) 'An ethnography of Swahili expressive culture', *Research in African Literatures* 15(3): 313-40.
- Elwert, Georg (1989) *An Intricate Oral Culture. On History, Humour and Social Control Among the Ayizô (Bénin)*, Sozialanthropologische Arbeitspapiere N° 16. Berlin: Das arabische Buch.
- Endruweit, Günter and Gisela Trommsdorf (eds.) (1989) *Wörterbuch der Soziologie*. Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag.
- Encyclopædia Britannica* (Micropædia 15th edition) (1985). Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica.

- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1940) *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1954) *The Institutions of Primitive Society. A Series of Broadcast Talks*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Finnegan, Ruth (1967) *Limba Stories and Story-Telling*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Finnegan, Ruth (1969) 'How to do things with words: performative utterances among the Limba of Sierra Leone', *Man* 4: 537-52.
- Finnegan, Ruth (1970) *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Finnegan, Ruth (1977) *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2nd edition, Bloomington: Indiana University Press).
- Finnegan, Ruth (1992) *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*. London: Routledge.
- Firth, Raymond (1975) 'Speech-making and authority in Tikopia', in Bloch, Maurice (ed.) *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, pp. 29-44. London: Academic Press.
- Fishman, Joshua A. (1972) 'Domains and the relationships between micro- and macrolinguistics' in Gumperz, John J. and Dell Hymes (eds.) *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, pp. 435-54. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Fortes, Meyer (1945) *The Dynamics of Clanship Among the Tallensi*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fretz, Rachel I. (1994) 'Through ambiguous talk: women's voices in Chokwe storytelling', *Oral Tradition* 9(1): 230-50.
- Furniss, Graham (1989) 'Typification and evaluation: a dynamic process in rhetoric', in Barber, Karin and P. F. de Moraes (eds.) *Discourse and its Disguises. The Interpretation of Oral Texts*. Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, Birmingham University African Studies Series 1.
- Furniss, Graham (1996) *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture in Hausa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Furniss, Graham and Liz Gunner (eds.) (1995) *Power, Marginality and Oral Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Geschiere, Peter (1982) *Village Communities and the State: Changing Relations Among the Maka of South-Eastern Cameroon since the Colonial Conquest*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Geiger, Theodor (1989 [1947]) *Vorstudien zu einer Soziologie des Rechts*. 4. Auflage. Berlin: Duncker und Humblot.
- Georges, Robert (1969) 'Towards an Understanding of Storytelling Events', *Journal of American Folklore* 83: 313-28.
- Goffman, Erving (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Goodwin, Charles and Alessandro Duranti (1992) 'Rethinking Context: An Introduction', in Duranti, A. and C. Goodwin (eds.) *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, pp. 1-42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gossen, Gary. H. (1971) 'Chamula genres of verbal behavior', *Journal of American Folklore* 84:145-67.
- Gossen, Gary H. (1974) *Chamulas in the World of the Sun: Time and Space in a Maya Oral Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Grätz, Tilo (1992) *Sprache und Kulturen Bénins, unveröffentlichter Lehrforschungsbericht*. Berlin: Institut für Ethnologie der Freien Universität Berlin.
- Grätz, Tilo (1998) *État, transformation politique et pouvoirs locaux à Tanguiéta. Essai d'anthropologie politique à partir d'une commune au Nord du Bénin*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Fakultät für Soziologie der Universität Bielefeld.
- Gregory, J. C. (1924) *The Nature of Laughter*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Grice, H. P. (1975) 'Logic and conversation', in Cole, Peter and Jerry Morgan (eds.) *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3: *Speech Acts*, pp. 41-58. New York: Academic Press.
- Gumperz, John J. and Dell Hymes (eds.) (1972) *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Gunner, Elizabeth (1979) 'Songs of innocence and experience: women as composers and performers of Izibongo, Zulu praise poetry', *Research in African Literatures* 10(2): 239-67.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1970) 'Der Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik', in Bubner, Rüdiger et al. (eds.) *Hermeneutik und Dialektik*, pp. 73-103. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr.

- Haring, Lee (1992) *Verbal Arts in Madagascar: Performance in Historical Perspective*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Herskovits, Melville and F. Herskovits (1958) *Dahomean Narrative: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Herzog, George and Charles G. Blooah (1936) *Jabo Proverbs From Liberia: Maxims in the Life of a Native Tribe*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Hobart, Mark (1975) 'Orators and patrons: two types of political leader in Balinese village society', in Bloch, Maurice (ed.) *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, pp. 65-92. London: Academic Press.
- Huber, Hugo (1979) *Tod und Auferstehung. Organisation, rituelle Symbolik und Lehrprogramm einer westafrikanischen Initiationsfeier*. Freiburg: Studia ethnographica friburgensia.
- Hymes, Dell (1974) *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hymes, Dell (1989) 'Ways of speaking' in Bauman, Richard and Joel Sherzer *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (2nd edition), pp. 433-51. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, Michael (1982a) *Allegories of the Wilderness*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jackson, Michael (1982b) 'Meaning and moral imagery in Kuranko myth', *Research in African Literatures* 13(2): 153-80.
- Jama, Zainab Mohamed (1994) 'Silent Voices: the Role of Somali Women's Poetry in Social and Political Life', *Oral Tradition* 9(1): 185-202.
- Jones, G. W. (1995) 'The Downfall of Margaret Thatcher', in Rhodes, A. A. W and Patrick Dunleavy *Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive*, pp. 87-109. London: Macmillan Press.
- Karl, Emmanuel (1974) *Traditions orales au Dahomey-Bénin*. Niamey: Centre régional de documentation pour la tradition orale.
- Keenan, Elinor Ochs (1974) *Conversation and Oratory in Vaninankaratra Madagascar*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara (1975) 'A parable in context: a social interactional analysis of storytelling performance', in Ben-Amos, D. and K. Goldstein (eds.) *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, pp. 105-30. The Hague: Mouton.
- Köhler, Oswin (1958) 'Zur Territorialgeschichte des östlichen Nigerbogens', *Baessler Archiv, Neue Folge* VI: 229-60.

- Kopperschmidt, Josef (1973) *Allgemeine Rhetorik: Einführung in die Theorie der persuasiven Kommunikation*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.
- Leach, Edmund R. (1961) 'Aesthetics', in Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (ed.) *The Institutions of Primitive Society: A Series of Broadcast Talks*, pp. 25-38. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Lieber, Michael D. (1984) 'Analogic ambiguity. A paradox of proverb usage', *Journal of American Folklore* 97: 423-41.
- Lord, Albert (1960) *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Marin, Carleta (1990) *Etude de l'occupation de l'espace préalable à l'aménagement d'un bassin versant du district de Matéri*, unpublished report, Matéri: Project A.C.O.R.D.
- Mercier, Paul (1949) 'Vocabulaire de quelques langues du nord Dahomey', *Études Dahoméennes* II: 73-83.
- Mercier, Paul (1968) *Tradition, changement, histoire. Les "Somba" du Dahomey septentrional*. Paris: Edition Anthropos.
- Messenger, John (1959) 'The role of proverbs in a Nigerian judicial system', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 15: 64-73.
- Middleton, John and David Tait (eds.) (1958) *Tribes Without Rulers: Studies in African Segmentary Systems*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Monye, Ambrose A. (1987) 'Indirection in Aniocha proverb usage', *Proverbium* 4: 111-26.
- Monye, Ambrose A. (1988) 'The use of the ideophone as a taxonomic element in the oral literary criticism of Aniocha proverbs', *Proverbium* 5: 117-27.
- Ndong, Norbert (1983) *Kamerunische Märchen: Text und Kontext in ethnographischer und psychologischer Sicht*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag.
- N'Ouéni, Windali Raphael (1983) *Contribution à l'étude phonologique du parler biali de Matéri avec application à l'établissement d'une orthographe pratique*. Cotonou: Université Nationale du Bénin.
- Norris, Edward Graham (1986) 'Atakora mountain refuges: systems of exploitation in Northern Togo', *Anthropos* 81: 109-36.
- Noss, Philip A. (1970) 'The performance of the Gbaya tale', *Research in African Literatures* 1(1): 41-49.
- Noss, Philip A. (1972) 'Description in Gbaya literary art', in Dorson, Richard *African Folklore*, pp. 73-94. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Noss, Philip A. (1979) 'Creation and the Gbaya tale', in Priebe, Richard K. and Thomas A. Hale (eds.) *Artist and Audience: African Literature and a Shared Experience*: Selected Proceedings from the 1977 African Literature Association, pp. 2-30. Washington: Three Continents Press.
- N'Tia, Roger (1993) 'Géopolitique de l'Atakora précolonial', *Afrika Zamani* 1: 107-23.
- Nwachukwu-Agbada, J. O. J. (1988) 'Bèkeè' in Igbo proverbial lore. *Proverbium* 5: 137-44.
- Ohmad, Saidu Babwa and Graham Furniss (1994) 'Pattern, interaction and the non-dialogic in performance by Hausa rap artists', *Oral Tradition* 9(1): 113-35.
- Ouanbini, Mathieu (1976/77) *Baptême comme initiation sociale chez les Berba pour une pastorale catéchétique du baptême chrétien*, unpublished MA dissertation. Université pontificale du Latran: Faculté de théologie pastorale.
- Okezie (Penfield), Joyce (1977) *The Role of Quoting Behavior as Manifested in the Use of Proverbs in Igbo Society*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of New York at Buffalo.
- Okpewho, Isidore (ed.) (1990a) *The Oral Performance in Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum.
- Okpewho, Isidore (1990b) 'Introduction', in Okpewho, Isidore (ed.) *The Oral Performance in Africa*, pp. 1-20. Ibadan: Spectrum.
- Okpewho, Isidore (1990c) 'The oral performer and his audience: a case study of *The Ozidi Saga*', in Okpewho, Isidore (ed.) *The Oral Performance in Africa*, pp. 160-84. Ibadan: Spectrum.
- Oléron, Pierre (1983) *L'argumentation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Paine, Robert (ed.). (1981a) *Politically Speaking: Cross-Cultural Studies of Rhetoric* Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Paine, Robert (1981b) 'Introduction' in Paine, Robert (ed.). *Politically Speaking: Cross-Cultural Studies of Rhetoric*, pp. 1-6. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Paine, Robert (1981c) 'When Saying is Doing', in Paine, Robert (ed.). *Politically Speaking: Cross-Cultural Studies of Rhetoric*, pp. 9-23. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Parkin, David (1984) 'Political language'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13: 345-65.

- Parker, Carolyn A. (1974) *Aspects of a Theory of Proverbs: Contexts and Messages of Proverbs in Swahili*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington.
- Paulme, Denise (1972) 'Morphologie du conte africain', *Cahiers d'études africaines* 45: 131-63.
- Peek, P. M. (1981) 'The power of words in African verbal arts', *Journal of American Folklore* 94: 19-43.
- Perelman, Chaim and Thomas O. Sloan (1983) 'Rhetoric' in *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* (Macropædia 15th edition), pp. 798-805. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica.
- Piddington, R. (1933) *The Psychology of Laughter: A Study in Social Adaptation* London: Figurehead.
- Pike, Kenneth (1966) 'Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behaviour', in Smith, A. G. (ed.) *Communication and Culture: Readings in the Codes of Human Interaction*, pp. 152-63. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Priebe, Richard. K. and T. A. Hale (eds.). (1979) *Artist and Audience: African Literature as a Shared Experience: Selected Proceedings from the 1977 African Literature Association*. Washington: Three Continent Press.
- Prost, André R. P. (1973) 'Les langues de l'Atakora III. Le BiEri'. *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, TXXXV, ser. B, 2: 444-511.
- Richards, A. (1960) *East African Chiefs: A Study of Political Development in Some Uganda and Tanganyika Tribes*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Roulon, Paulette and Raymond Doko (1982) 'Un pays de conteurs', *Cahiers de Littérature Orale* 11: 123-34.
- Roulon, Paulette and Raymond Doko (1983) 'La parole pilée: Accès au symbolisme chez les Gbáyá 'bòdòè de Centrafrique', *Cahiers de Littérature Orale* 13: 33-49.
- Schäfers, Bernhard (1986) *Grundbegriffe der Soziologie*. Opladen: Leske und Budrich.
- Scheub, Harold (1972) 'The art of Nongenile Mazithatu Zenani, a Gcaleka Ntsomi performer', in Dorson, Richard *African Folklore*, pp. 115-42. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Scheub, Harold (1975) 'Narrative Patterning in Oral Performance', *Ba Shiru*, 7(2): 10-30.

- Scheub, Harold (1977) 'The technique of the expansible image in Xhosa *Ntsomi* performances', in Lindfors, Bernd (ed.) *Forms of Folklore in Africa: Narrative, Poetic, Gnostic, Dramatic*, pp. 119-46. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Seitel, Peter Isaac (1972) *Proverbs and the Structure of Metaphor Among the Haya of Tanzania*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- Seitel, Peter Isaac (1976) 'Proverbs: a social use of metaphor', in Ben-Amos, Dan (ed.) *Folklore Genres*, pp. 125-43. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Seitel, Peter Isaac (1977) 'Saying Haya sayings: two categories of proverb use', in Sapir, David J. and J. C. Crocker (eds.) *The Social Use of Metaphor*, pp. 75-99. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Sekoni, Ropo (1990) 'The narrator, narrative pattern and audience experience of oral narrative performance' in Okpewho, Isidore (ed.) *The Oral Performance in Africa*, pp. 139-59. Ibadan: Spectrum.
- Sherzer, Joel (1983) *Kuna Ways of Speaking: an Ethnographic Perspective*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Sherzer, Joel (1990) *Verbal Art in San Blas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sigrist, Christian (1967) *Regulierte Anarchie: Untersuchung zum Fehlen und zur Entstehung politischer Herrschaft in segmentären Gesellschaften Afrikas*. Olten und Freiburg i. Br.: Walten-Verlag.
- Smith, Edwin W. and Andrew Murray Dale (1920) *The Ila-Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia* (2 vols.). London: Macmillan.
- Strathern, Andrew (1975) 'Veiled Speech in Mount Hagen' in Bloch, Maurice (ed.) *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, pp. 184-204. London: Academic Press.
- Tassou, Zakarie (1989) *Enquête agro-écologique et socio-économique dans le district de Matéri*, unpublished report, Matéri: A.C.O.R.D.
- Tiando, Emmanuel (1978) *Perspectives d'approche historique des populations de l'Atakora. L'exemple de Waaba, Tangamba, Daataba*. Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université Nationale du Bénin.
- Tiando, Emmanuel (1987) 'Article sur l'invasion coloniale dans l'Atakora (1916-1917) en souvenir de Bio Tchanyeba dit Kaba, héros de la résistance', *Quotidien Ehuzu*, N° 2917.
- Timpunza Mvula, Ernestine S. (1987) *Women's Oral Poetry as a Social Strategy in Malawi*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University.



- Turton, David (1975) 'The relationship between oratory and the exercise of influence among the Mursi', Bloch, Maurice (ed.) *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, pp. 163-83. London: Academic Press.
- Watson-Gegeo, Karen and Geoffrey White (eds.) (1990) *Disentangling: Conflict Discourse in Pacific Societies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Whiting, B. J. (1933) 'The origin of the proverb', *Harvard Notes* 13: 47-78.
- Yai, Olabiyi (1989) 'Issues in oral poetry: criticism, teaching and translation', in Barber, Karin and P. F. de Moraes (eds.) *Discourse and its Disguises. The Interpretation of Oral Texts*, pp. 59-69. Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, Birmingham University African Studies Series 1.
- Yankah, Kwesi (1985) 'Risks in verbal art performance', *Journal of Folklore Research*. Special Issue, *Folklore and Semiotics* 22(2/3): 133-53.
- Yankah, Kwesi (1986a) 'Proverb rhetoric and African judicial process: the untold story', *Journal of American Folklore* 99: 280-303.
- Yankah, Kwesi (1986b) 'Proverb speaking as a creative process: the Akan of Ghana', *Proverbium* 3: 195 -230.
- Yankah, Kwesi (1989a) *The Proverb in the Context of Akan Rhetoric. A Theory of Proverb Praxis*. Bern/ Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Yankah, Kwesi (1989b) 'Proverbs: problems and strategies in field research', *Proverbium* 6: 165 -76.
- Yankah, Kwesi. (1991) 'Power and the circuit of formal talk', *Journal of Folklore Research* 28(1): 1-22.
- Yankah, Kwesi (1995) *Speaking for the Chief: Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Zwernemann, Jürgen (1985) *Erzählungen aus der westafrikanischen Savanne*. Stuttgart/ Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag.